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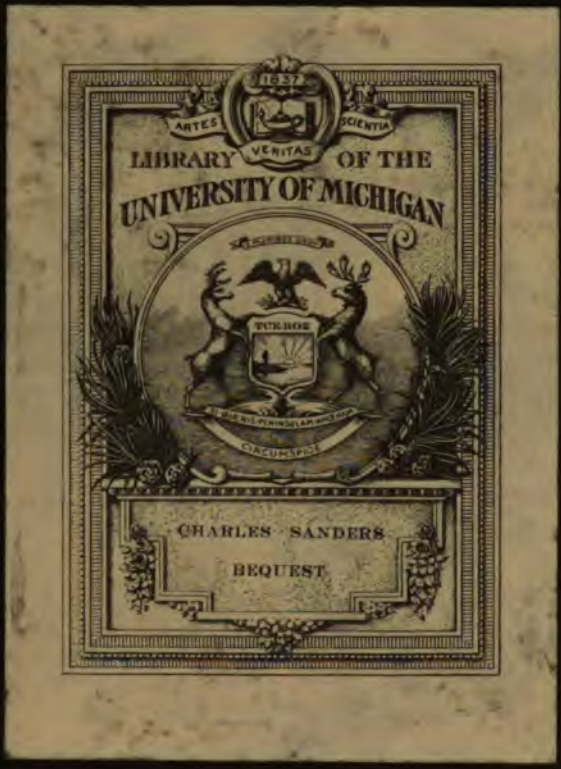

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MR. & MRS. BANCROFT

ON AND OFF THE STAGE.

WRITTEN

BY THEMSELVES.

WITH PORTRAITS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.
1888.
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TO

OUR FELLOW-WORKERS AND COMRADES

ON THE STAGE

WE DEDICATE

THIS BOOK

FOR SOME OF WHOM WE HAVE

A DEEP AFFECTION

FOR MANY OTHERS

A TRUE FRIENDSHIP

AND WITH ALL

AN ENDURING SYMPATHY.

Charles Sanders
Bequest
10-7-27
20.

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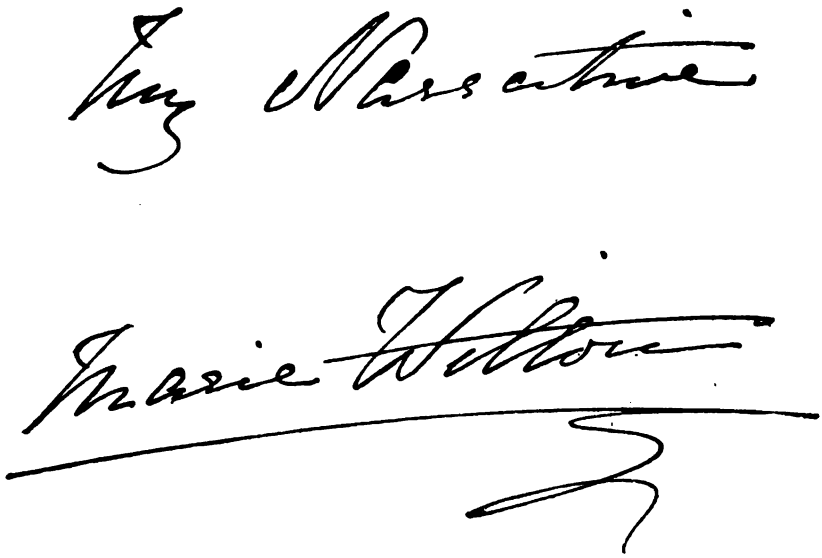

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CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD AND GIRLHOOD.

Place aux dames. I make no pretence to literary skill, and can only tell my story in a very simple way, in the belief that, as nearly all my life has been passed in the service of the public, I may speak to the reader as to a patient and sympathetic friend.

My father was Robert Pleydell Wilton. My mother's name before she married him was Georgiana Jane Faulkner. I am one of six surviving children born to them, all of whom were girls. How it came to pass that I had any ability as an actress, I could never understand; neither my father nor my mother being born to the stage, so to speak, nor was either of them distinguished in their adopted calling.

My father came of an old Gloucestershire family, and was originally intended for the Church; but that idea was soon abandoned, for he was infatuated with an early love for the stage. He first tried the sea, however, then the law, and in a fit of martial ardour, having quarrelled with his father, he enlisted as a soldier; but, after serving his King and country for

twenty-four hours, he regretted his hasty step and implored to be bought out. His father declined, but his mother came to the rescue, as mothers always do, and so ended my father's brief military career. He then returned to his favourite books (Shakespeare's plays), and fancied himself in turn the hero of them all; his love for the drama was a great anxiety to his parents and friends, but it grew upon him more and more, and eventually he left his home to become an actor, and so laid the foundation-stone of my stage-life.

At that time, far more than now, the profession of the stage was looked upon by many with great horror. To be an actor meant exile from home, family, friends, and general respectability. This was my father's lot; none of his belongings ever knew him again, and when he died, he and his only surviving brother, through my father's own folly, had not spoken to each other for very many years.

My father, as I have often heard him say with a sigh of regret, was of an unsettled, restless nature, and a great anxiety at home, his mother, of course, clinging to him as only mothers do cling to those of their children who are, to say the least, tiresome. My father had no idea of money, no thought for the morrow; he was generous to a fault, and if he had but a few shillings in his pocket, he would share his little fortune with anyone in trouble; he had a beautiful tenor voice—a gift he was too careless ever to cultivate properly; he possessed many ac-

complishments but practised none; in fact, I fear I must describe him as a handsome, thoughtless, kind-hearted 'Bohemian.'

My father's mother was a Miss Wise, daughter of the Rev. William Wise, who was a Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and afterwards for seventeen years Rector of St. James's, Liverpool, and sister to the Rev. William Wise, D.D., also a Fellow of St. John's, and for twenty-one years Rector of St. Laurence, Reading. Several members of my father's family were clergymen, soldiers, and doctors, well known in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Three of them have been Mayors of Gloucester during this century. John Pleydell Wilton was almost a local Whittington, as he filled the office twice.

My maternal grandmother was a Miss Watts Browne, daughter of General Browne. She married Mr. Samuel Faulkner; 'Gentleman' Faulkner he was called, on account of his courtly manner and irreproachable character. He was either one of the proprietors or the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, then a leading London newspaper; and was a highly gifted man—a profound scholar, and master of many languages. He might have made a name in the literary or political world had he not, unfortunately, been deluded into joining a partnership, and putting his money into the management of the York Circuit (to which my old friend, the celebrated Mrs. Keeley, once belonged in my grandfather's time); but, knowing next to nothing of theatrical matters, and

owing partly to the treachery of others (which I will not further dwell on here), lost all he possessed. These reverses, added to the death of his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, pressed so heavily upon him as seriously to affect his mind. He sank into a state of hopeless melancholia, and ended by committing suicide, leaving his orphan children—two sons (one of whom was afterwards in the Army, the other in the Navy), and three girls—to the guardianship of a rich uncle, who paid all my grandfather's liabilities. The account of this sad event was edged with black in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle*, out of regard for his memory. My father, who was much older than my mother, when but a travelling actor, met and ran away with her. His rashness cost them dear; their future lot for many years being little else than toil, anxiety, and care.

Often in later life have I sat with them by the fireside on a winter's night, when they have recalled to me stories of my childhood, and events in our early days together, which have carried me painfully back to the past, and brought many a tear to my eyes. My father would at such times dwell upon his love for his mother, who, had she lived, would by her gentle influence have brought him back, even if he had wandered for a time; but she was dead, and with her died the olive-branch which made peace between father and son. Dazzled by the surface-glitter of the stage, he went his way, building castles

in the air, living in dreamland, and hoping for a position which never came to him. My poor 'vagabond' father made his choice, and the moment he stepped on to the stage (only to sing in a chorus) he, in the estimation of his friends, struck the fatal key-note to his destruction. He had been defiled, and nothing could wash him clean again. He paid dearly for his folly all the rest of his life. Had he been wiser, he might have been somebody, and have held a position in society to which he was by birth entitled; my mother spared a life of anxiety and care, and I should never have been born. However, so it was, and so it is, and here I am!

Having shown, when very young, ability beyond my years, being taught when but four or five years old to recite poems and dramatic scenes, I was brought out as a child actress, although hardly able to speak plainly. It was thought a great achievement then to stand alone on a big stage and recite. What a nuisance I must have been! Luckily the fashion does not exist nowadays. Fortunate children! fortunate public! I wish I could recall a happy childhood; but, alas! I can remember only work and responsibility from a very tender age. No games, no romps, no toys—nothing which makes a child's life joyous. I can recollect a doll, but not the time to play with it, for we only met at night, when it shared my pillow; and as I looked into its face, before I fell asleep after my work, I often wished that I could play with it sometimes.

When other children were cosily tucked up in bed, dreaming of their sunny lives, their limbs tired only by the romps and pleasures of the day, I was trudging by my father's side in all weathers to the theatre, where I had to play somebody else's child, or to recite one of the many character sketches which my father had written for me. In one of them I remember I used to be dressed as a little jockey; in another, as a wee sailor, in little white trousers and blue jacket; the miniature hornpipe I danced being always sure of earning loud applause, and it often had to be repeated. I was, of course, much petted by the public; but oh, the work! My poor little body was often sadly tired; I was roused many a time from a sound sleep to go upon the stage, and sometimes, in my half-wakefulness, would begin the wrong recitation.

Up again betimes in the morning; a hasty kiss to my doll, who grew to be regarded as a confirmed invalid, and never left her bed, except for a short time on Sundays; part of the early day being spent in learning some fresh part, or in being taught lessons by my mother—to me a joyful labour, as I always had a great desire to learn, and even when quite a little child, so anxious was I to be able to read, I have frequently stopped people to explain and spell with me the names of streets, and would cut out the big letters from play-bills and put them together to form words: perhaps early copies made of my father's and my mother's letters, although not able to read

them, may account for my eccentric half-masculine, half-feminine handwriting. Once I rebelled while reciting as a little gipsy: I was discovered at a wood-fire, with a hanging-kettle over it, my father being at one side of the stage, and my mother on the other, ready to prompt me. My father gave me the words I recited, and my mother followed them with the expression of countenance I should assume at certain passages; so I looked from one to the other for my cue. But on this particular night my small temper had been upset, and I somehow got mixed. When my father saw that I was nearly breaking down in the words, I assumed his angry expression of face, although I ought to have been smiling, and imitated the encouraging face of my mother when I should have been sad. To the great horror of my parents, when I went forward to tell the audience their fortunes, I saw our landlady in the front row of the pit, her face beaming with delight at my performance. I dropped my little basket of songs and cards, and stretched out my arms to her, crying, 'No, no; me no stage—me go pit.' The next time our landlady witnessed one of my performances it was from a more elevated position—the gallery!

At the age of five I recited Collins's *Ode to the Passions*, being accompanied by the special music. I wore a white lace frock and a lovely blue sash, of which I was very proud; it was winter-time, and my mother has told me since that my poor little arms and legs were so red through the cold that I repre-

sented a tricolour, and ought to have recited the *Marseillaise* instead!

Among the selections I had to learn as a child were the 'Trial scene from the *Merchant of Venice*,' the 'Balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*,' the 'Sleep-walking scene from *Macbeth*,' and 'Satan's address to the Sun.' My dear mother toiled night and day to drill the words into my young head. Although, as I have said, she never held a position on the stage, her talent for teaching was very great; the art of elocution in her school-days being a branch of education, and lectures on the subject were delivered to the pupils by competent professors. She thus was able to give me what I never could have hoped to attain by other means, a knowledge of elocution and voice-production, to which I owe the power of making every word heard, even in a whisper, in any building, however large.

I have never forgotten a little lecture which my mother gave me in order to impress upon my young mind the necessity of making myself heard by the entire audience; she thought of a plan by which she could touch my feelings, as I suppose she found it difficult to make me quite understand, at that early age, the meaning of making the voice travel round the house. She said: 'There is a poor man who is the last to get into the gallery, and consequently only has a corner in the back row of all, therefore he sees and hears with great difficulty; he has been working hard and has saved his sixpence to give himself a little

treat. How dreadful then it would be to find that he cannot hear what the actors are talking about! how he must envy those more fortunate than himself, and how unhappy he must be! Think of him when you are acting; direct your voice to the poor man who is sitting at the very back of the gallery, and he will be grateful to you.'

My mother has often reminded me that as a child I was difficult to manage: impetuous, wilful, enthusiastic, ambitious; easy to lead, difficult to command; a long speech in anger would fail to affect me, but a few gentle words would quickly conquer me. This appeal to my better nature therefore succeeded, for ever afterwards I addressed myself to the 'poor man' at the back of the gallery, as, of course, if the rest of the audience heard me he must.

To show in what estimation country folk held the stage in my childhood days, I will tell what happened to me at an amateur entertainment which was given to aid a church-building fund. The programme was a varied one; my contribution of one or two recitations caused a flutter of admiration, especially amongst the ladies present, many of whom were district visitors, and expressed their approval loudly, in such remarks as, 'Wonderful!' '*Most* interesting!' 'Dear little thing!' 'How clever!' When the entertainment was over, these ladies asked to be allowed to speak to me. I was taken to them, and passed from one to another, undergoing meanwhile a kind of inspection: they kissed and petted

ne. 'What a sweet child!' said one. 'You must come some day to see mamma.' 'What lovely hair!' said another: the fuss they made about me was overpowering.

The gentleman who led me to them suggested to these ladies that they might subscribe a small sum to buy me a toy, as a souvenir of the occasion. They consented eagerly, and at once opened their clasped-bags. While hunting for their purses, they asked with sweet smiles 'whose dear child I was.' When told that I was the daughter of an actor, the smiles vanished, and the expressions changed in a way to have turned even lemons sour. The bags were closed with a cold relentless click, and the owners muttered between their teeth (for fear, doubtless, of breathing the same air as myself), 'Oh, gracious!' 'Horrid!' 'Oh dear!' 'Unfortunate child!' and drew back from me as if plague-stricken. This scene dwelt upon my young mind, and I never forgot it. The poor ladies doubtless returned home scandalized and defiled; but the church did not suffer; the few bricks to which I subscribed have kept their places and have not quarrelled with the others on my account.

There seemed to me to be constant travelling in my childhood days; I cannot remember a settled home, and recall only a very restless life. Even at that early age I was aware of the responsibility of being at my post when required. Fines were often discussed in my presence with dread; and every day, as the hour drew near for rehearsals, I would run

upstairs to put on my hat and pelisse, and call out to my father that we must make haste or we should be late. My anxiety to be 'in time' was always very great. Once when the company was about to start for one of the towns in the Norwich circuit, to which we were attached, my mother having been informed that I should not be wanted for a fortnight, decided upon leaving me for part of it with the family in whose house we lodged, and who were fond of me. My parents had not been gone three days, when a letter arrived from them, saying that the *Green Bushes* was to be acted in a hurry the next night instead of something else. I, as the child-actress of the company, had often played Eveleen, so I was to be sent off at once. Preparations were immediately made for my departure, but as we arrived at the station we saw the last train moving away. My distress was terrible. I at once thought of the rehearsal the next morning; I was too young to argue that having played the part so frequently it would not much matter; I only knew that fines were the punishment for absence from duty, and I must go somehow. The people with whom I was staying did all in their power to pacify me, but I persisted that I must go. It happened that a cart, or covered van, filled with sacks of meal or flour, was going that night to a village not far from my destination. The driver offered to take charge of me, and remarked when he saw my anxiety, that he had 'no idea play-acting people was so per-

ticlar.' The husband of our landlady decided to accompany me, and away we started. My bed was made at the bottom of the cart in some hay between the sacks, and really I was not uncomfortable. The driver's little dog made friends with me, and I slept with him in my arms. The cart shook a good bit, but so happy was I, knowing that every mile took me nearer to my duty, that I slept the sleep of a contented child. We stopped at a roadside inn to rest the horses, when I was lifted out of the cart and taken to sit by the fire. I can well remember some roughish-looking men sitting about. There was a large fire, with a curious-looking tin saucepan, shaped like a fool's cap turned upside down, and filled with hot ale, in which eggs were beaten up. The men, who were all smoking, soon got into conversation with my two guardians. They looked very hard at me, and asked all sorts of questions; who I was, how I came to be there with them, and one of them jokingly remarked, 'You ain't been a-kidnapping, 'ave you?' I felt indignant at this, knowing how good they had both been to me. An explanation of the case interested them, and when they were told who I was, they shouted, 'What! a play-actor?' and immediately requested the driver of the cart to ask me to 'do a piece.' 'Will ye, child?' he said. I shook my head, and he continued, 'I won't ask the little lass; she's tired.' This touched me, and I at once jumped up and recited something; I forget what, but I caused such enthusiasm that I thought

they would all eat me. I had to do another 'piece' for them, and by this time everyone employed about the inn, hearing that something unusual was going on, had assembled. I shall never forget the scene, which Dickens could have wonderfully described. The villagers, smoking and drinking; my two guardians sitting together, and smiling as if they were responsible for the talent displayed; the landlord and his wife standing in the doorway, and several heads peering over theirs; the windows thrown open, and stable-boys and farm-labourers sitting on the window-sills with their mouths wide open. I thought they were all idiots, for they laughed like them. When I had finished, murmurs of 'Eh, that's foin!' and 'Wonderful, ain't it?' came from all of them. The moment arrived for starting. How thankful I was! They all came to the door to see me off, and the rough but kindly men treated me like a little queen. Although I was glad to get away from this strange society, I did not regret having given them a little amusement. But when they asked me for a kiss at parting, I didn't know what to do, for they all smelt of beer. I had 'roughed it' a good deal, but there were limits! When I said I would not permit them to kiss me, one of them replied, 'We ain't gentlefolk, surely; but you are a little angel, and we ain't used to the loiks of yer.' I thought to myself, it will make them happy, and it won't take a minute; so I presented my cheek to them, at which they laughed, but kissed it.

I was lifted into the cart as carefully as if it had been a grand carriage, and we drove off. I settled into my bed of hay and sacks, and after well wiping my cheek, where they had left their beer-marks, I went to sleep again. When I arrived at the theatre early in the morning, escorted by one of my guardians, who told the whole story, I received a scolding for my pains. I must have presented a strange appearance, for my clothes and hair were covered with meal from the sacks, and some one remarked that I looked as if my clothes had suffered a bad illness.

Soon after this we found ourselves at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, where I was the child actress of the company and appeared in the pantomime of *Gulliver's Travels* as the little 'Emperor of Lilliput'—a very tiny monarch. A gentleman who played one of the parts in this pantomime attracted my attention, and I can well remember the incident.

Children are all, more or less, prone to express their thoughts, and give their opinions at the most awkward moments. I was particularly celebrated in this way; my early training for the stage naturally sharpened my powers of observation, and any eccentricity of manner, or an unusual physical peculiarity, immediately attracted my notice; and, if I did not happen to express in words my interest and astonishment, I continued to look so long with a puzzled and inquiring face, that the poor creature, whoever it might be, became more and more uncomfortable. I, of course, was perfectly unconscious of the discomfi-

ture I was creating, and would, with a wrinkled brow and wondering stare, fix my eyes upon the, to me, unaccountable freak of nature.

This particular gentleman happened to be severely pitted and disfigured by deep marks of that terrible disease, smallpox. I could not take my eyes from his face; wherever he went I followed, and stood gazing at him, until at last he said abruptly, 'What on earth are you staring at, child?' I replied in thoughtless innocence, 'I'm looking at your face; it's like a crumpet!' It will be readily understood that this inquiring and observant nature was an anxiety to my mother, who tried very hard by threats, scoldings, and entreaties to break me of it; but in spite of promises of better behaviour, I could not resist the temptation whenever it occurred.

One day a friend of my father's, whom he had not seen for years, had been invited to a Sunday dinner; and as a treat my father requested that I should be allowed to sit at table. This gentleman was unfortunately afflicted with an enormous bluish nose, which was absolutely remarkable. My mother urged the danger of my being in the room, for she was certain that it would attract my attention at once, and she would suffer tortures. But my father said that if I was prepared for the peculiarity before seeing the gentleman, and warned that if I said anything I should be turned out of the room (a fearful indignity to me), he was sure it would be all right. I was duly cautioned by my mother, who told me that to

take any marked notice of the gentleman would not only make her angry, but would wound his feelings besides, as he was sensitive on that subject. I promised faithfully that I would not utter a word. When seated at table, the sight of this extraordinary feature almost took my breath away; it was the largest nose I had ever seen out of a pantomime, and take my eyes off it I could not. My mother, whenever she could by kicks and looks attract my attention (which was seldom, for it was fixed on the nose), looked daggers at me. She suffered agonies until dinner was over, and was much relieved when the moment came to kiss me and say good-night. She then whispered 'Good child.' With pride and delight I returned to my father's side, and asked him if I had been good; when he kissed me I shouted with glee, 'I didn't say anything about the gentleman's blue nose, did I, father?' *Tableau!*

I can just remember Macready playing his farewell engagement in the country, before retiring from the stage. In *Macbeth* I acted the part of the boy Fleance, and also appeared as the apparition of the crowned child who rises from the caldron when summoned by the witches, to warn the guilty Thane. At the end of the play the great tragedian sent for me, and I was taken by my mother to his room. I was terribly nervous, for I had heard so many people say how proud and distant Macready always was, and I feared I was summoned to be scolded. My

mother knocked at the door, and a deep tragic 'Come in' sent my little heart into my boots. We still waited at the door; his valet opened it, and there was the great actor seated in a large easy-chair, his head resting upon his hand, and looking, as I thought, very tired and cross; the room was dimly lighted. We hesitated, not knowing quite what to do, when the voice from the chair said in measured tones, dwelling upon each syllable, 'Who-is-it?' I felt awe-stricken, as though still in the presence of a king. The dresser said, 'It's the little girl you sent for, sir.' Macready answered, 'Oh, yes! turn up the gas,' much in the same tone in which he had said, 'Duncan comes here to-night.' But he looked at me kindly, and said very gently, 'Come here, child,' holding out his hand. I went to him; he patted me on the head and kissed me; then, after looking at me for a moment, said: 'Well, I suppose you hope to be a great actress some day?' I replied quickly, 'Yes, sir.' He smiled. 'And what do you intend to play?' 'Lady Macbeth, sir,' upon which he laughed loudly and said: 'Oh! is that all? Well, I like your ambition; you are a strange little thing, and have such curious eyes; but you must change them before you play Lady Macbeth, or you will make your audience laugh instead of cry.' I did not quite like this; but he soon won my heart by saying: 'Will you have a sovereign to buy a doll with, or a glass of wine?' After a little hesitation, I answered, 'I should like

both, I think.' He seemed to enjoy my frank reply, and said laughingly, 'Good! I am sure you will make a fine actress; I can see genius through those little windows,' placing his hands over my eyes. 'But do not play Lady Macbeth too soon; begin slowly, or you may end quickly!' I drank my wine, took my sovereign, and went home rejoicing, feeling as proud as any little peacock. The great man had condescended to pat me on the head, and had absolutely kissed me. I did not want to wash my face again!

It was at Manchester that Miss Glyn came to the theatre as a 'star,' accompanied by Charles Kemble, whose pupil she was. Although he was now very old and deaf, I remember well the impression he made upon me at a rehearsal when I crept into the wings and saw them go through the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*. Not a word or gesture escaped me; I was much impressed, and I determined that I *must* some day play Lady Macbeth. That day has not yet arrived!

King John was also produced for Miss Glyn, and I played Prince Arthur: Charles Kemble was in a private box at night, watching the play. In the scene where the little prince is trying to escape from his prison, and falls from the battlements, I suddenly heard the sound of some one talking out loud, and then a laugh somewhere in the theatre. I became nervous, and thought something must have happened to my dress. I dared not move, for fear of

causing more laughter, and there I lay in terrible suspense until I was carried off by Hubert. I was then told that Mr. Kemble had suddenly become very excited, had stood up in the stage-box, and shouted out something quite loudly; no one could tell me what he had said, but an account of it appeared afterwards in some of the papers, one of which I have by me now, headed, 'The Veteran and the Child.' 'Charles Kemble sat anxiously watching the progress of the play of *King John*. He seldom applauded, and, for the most part, seemed saddened, perhaps by the memories of those halcyon days when his great brother was the King, and he the gallant Falconbridge; but the scene between Hubert and Prince Arthur awoke his approving smiles. More than once he clapped his hands, and when the little prince fell from the battlements, and the young actress exclaimed, with exquisite pathos—

> "'Ah me, my uncle's spirit's in these stones;
> Heaven take my soul, and England keep my bones!"

the old actor was so carried away by his enthusiasm as to rise in the box where he was sitting, and exclaim: "That girl will be a great actress." "That girl" was Marie Wilton.'

I was sent for by Charles Kemble, and complimented very warmly by him, and by Miss Glyn. Oddly enough, the old gentleman repeated Macready's advice to me: 'Climb not the ladder too quickly, or you may come suddenly to the ground

again.' He spoke very kindly, but every question he asked I was obliged to answer with a shout. When he said, 'You spoke your lines beautifully,' I replied: 'Oh! but you are deaf, sir; you could not hear me.' He laughed and answered: 'I could see your words, child; your little face spoke them. But why wear a wig? The hair was too long.' I answered quickly, 'I wear no wig, sir; it was my own hair,' upon which he seemed surprised, and said: 'Bless the child, I thought it was a wig.' I was a little indignant at this remark, for my mother took great pride in my hair, carefully brushing it night and morning for so long that my father remarked once, 'That child will soon have no brains—you will brush them all out!'

While at Manchester I was a pupil of Mademoiselle Cushnie, the *première danseuse*, when, through some accident in practising, an injury was done to my foot, and I suffered acute pain. No one seemed to understand what was the matter. At length it was discovered that a tiny bone had been displaced, and I could not put my foot to the ground. I was a cripple on crutches for a considerable time, the only part I was able to play being poor Tiny Tim in Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol:* and I still retain a most agreeable recollection of the plum-pudding which we had to eat upon the stage. At length, after careful nursing, I happily recovered the use of my foot, though for a long while my health was delicate, and caused my mother much anxiety.

When, through my lameness, I was not acting, I was taken now and then as a treat to a travelling circus, well known as Pablo Fanque's, which was then in the town; and this reminds me of our eccentric landlady, who rejoiced in the proud name of O'Brien. In appearance she was a tall, gaunt, lean woman, with high cheek-bones, pale blue eyes, a white and much freckled skin, and a mass of fiery red hair, which she seldom brushed, and fastened at the top of her head with a single hair-pin. This poor lady had a mania that her husband, had he lived, would have been a rightful claimant to the throne of Ireland; but as there was not one, nor a likelihood of one, he thought he would not wait: Mrs. O'Brien's presence was not sufficient temptation for him to 'lag superfluously' on this earth, so he died, leaving her to bewail the fact of having to reside in an unpretentious house, situated in a still more unpretentious street, instead of enjoying the O'Brien rights and passing her life in a palace.

We never ascertained what particular palace she laid claim to, so concluded it to be somewhere in the clouds. Her only son, whom she always addressed as 'Master O'Brien,' answered to his mother's description in appearance as far as hair, eyes, and freckles went. He was a puny, scared-looking creature, and might remind one of Squeers' boys: his thin legs were too long for his trousers, and his thinner arms were ditto as regards his jacket, while his head looked as if every red hair had quarrelled with its

neighbour; a sharp, cold-looking nose, of the chronic influenza type, getting pink towards the end, while his scraggy neck resembled that of a recently-plucked elderly chicken. This rare specimen of humanity, who was constantly forced into notice as 'the heir to the throne of Ireland,' was not permitted to enjoy life like other boys. Mrs. O'Brien strictly forbade him to mix with those who, of necessity, were beneath him, and the poor lad was made to sit on a very high stool during a great part of the day—as a kind of rehearsal, perhaps, of the regal position he might hold should his claims ever be recognised—gazing at the crownless head of Mrs. O'Brien, except when the aforesaid hair-pin would drop out: then he would descend, and with a low bow restore it to the hands of his deluded mother. One morning Master O'Brien, under the impression that his mother was out, actually summoned up courage to join in a game of leapfrog with some other boys in the street. Suddenly his pleasure was interrupted by the ghost-like appearance of his indignant parent on the doorstep. She glanced at her only son, and roared out, just as he was in the act of leaping over another boy's back, 'Master O'Brien! Master O'Brien! it's handing your mamma to her carriage ye ought to be, and not Pablo Fanqueing it about the streets!'

Poor Mrs. O'Brien could boast of no better vehicle than a wheelless barrow in the back-yard; but she felt she ought to have her carriage, and that

was enough. With all her eccentricity she was kindly-natured, and her delusions hurt no one.

Brighter days seemed in store for us when my father, I believe, heard some news of a brother; his delight was intense, for, though they had not met for years, he was confident that a reconciliation would take place, and that all anxiety about our precarious position would cease. Oh, the castles that my father built in the 'airiest of situations'! assuring my mother that she and her children would now be placed in their proper positions, and that servants were at once to be engaged to wait upon us; but his dreams of magnificence (which always led people to believe that we were better off than we really were) were soon dispelled. My mother, who never relied for one moment upon her husband's vague dreams, continued to train us up to wait upon ourselves.

My poor father's character was very like that of Micawber, with a strong dash of dear old Triplet, always hoping for 'something to turn up,' and always looking on the sunny side, however bad things seemed to be. Dear old dad—his bright nature helped us through many a trouble. Often and often when our spirits were low he would tell us anecdotes and stories of his early stage-days, one of which comes now to my mind, and always struck me as being very amusing. It was, and is still, I think, a custom in country theatres when a military play is acted, and men are required on the stage as soldiers,

for the Colonel of the regiment then quartered in the town to lend a certain number of his men to the manager, who were glad, for good conduct, to add a little money to their pay. I forget the name of the play, and the town in which it took place, but the regiment was an Irish one. At the end of an act a decisive battle was fought between the two armies; the soldiers were represented on the one side by men attached to the theatre, and on the other by regulars from the garrison.

On this particular occasion the performance was a 'bespeak' night, and 'under the patronage of the Colonel and officers of the regiment,' all of whom, of course, were present. Everything went well up to the battle-scene, when the signal was given for the fight to cease, and for the regulars, who personated the beaten foe, to retreat; but on this eventful evening they took no notice. The actor who appeared as one of the commanding officers kept shouting to them, 'Retreat! why don't you retreat?' They still fought on in terrible earnest, and punished their opponents so unmercifully that at last they threw down their arms and used their fists instead. The result was a real all-round scrimmage. Actors concerned in the scene shouted to the men to retreat, as they had done quietly enough night after night; the commanding officer calling at the top of his voice, 'Retreat! I tell you, retreat!' Eventually the curtain had to be dropped on the conflict, when the manager, who made an angry appearance on

the stage, furiously asked the men, 'What does all this mean? why didn't you retreat?' To which one of the soldiers, a sergeant with his face much damaged, replied indignantly, 'Is it retrate you'd have us, *with the Colonel in front? Divil a bit!*'

During my early life a wealthy Roman Catholic widow lady took a great fancy to me, and besought my father to allow her to adopt me, to place me in a convent for education, and, on leaving it, to return to my parents from time to time, her conditions being that I should assume her name, and never appear upon the stage again. In return for all this, her fortune would be left me. I used often to attend early mass, being taken to the church by the late Edmund Falconer, the author of *Peep o' Day* and other Irish dramas, who was then a member of the company we belonged to. I merely mention this incident to show that I had an early love for the Catholic faith, which only slept for so many years afterwards. I often reflect how changed things might have been had my father consented, and how different my position in the world!

After further wanderings—we seemed to be always 'moving on'—we joined the company of the Bristol Theatre, of which Mr. James Henry Chute was manager. My first appearance there was in the opening of a pantomime as 'No-Wun-No-Zoo, Spright of the Silver Star;' the sky opened, and I was discovered high up in the clouds, prettily dressed in pale blue silk and spangles, my long hair hanging

in large waves over my shoulders. As I was lowered by machinery, which every now and then gave an uncomfortable jerk, I was conscious of an anxious look upon my face, and feared the great tragedian's words, 'Climb not the ladder too quickly, or you may tumble when you least expect it,' were about to be realized. I was instructed to come down with a happy smile upon my face, but the expression must have resembled the fixed stare one sees on a photograph after the victim's long and tedious sitting. My voice was very thin, and not improved by my anxiety to get safely landed on the stage, so I fear I did not distinguish myself in these opening words of my song:

'Ah! No-Wun-No-Zoo will astonish a few,
For he fancies it's rather a thing that will do;
And folks with surprise will open their eyes,
When they turn to a page of this comical size.'

The *Bristol Mercury* thus kindly spoke of my *début* there: 'The "dark vaulted ether" suddenly discloses a brilliant star, from whose effulgence emerges No-Wun-No-Zoo, which character was played by a clever, and we must add exceedingly pretty girl, who made a first appearance—Miss M. Wilton.'

I gradually became a great favourite, and was happy in Bristol, where there was a most excellent company, many of whom have since been well known. It was an admirably conducted theatre, and will always be remembered by me as my step-

ping-stone to London. Mr. Chute was an excellent manager; a severe disciplinarian, but a tender-hearted and just man. His wife, who was related to Macready, was a most kindly lady, and I remember her goodness to me with much gratitude. Fines were strictly inflicted in those days; but I have known Mr. Chute many a time return, privately, the forfeit-money to those who he knew could ill afford to spare it, saying, 'Do not say anything about it, and do not be late again'—a good, kind-hearted, severe old manager. The work was hard, but some of our best artists have left the old King Street Theatre to fill leading positions in London. Names that come at once to my mind are Kate and Ellen Terry, Madge Robertson (Mrs. Kendal), Henrietta Hodson, and Charles Coghlan. Oh for a few such provincial theatres now as that, or the old Edinburgh Theatre, so admirably governed for years by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wyndham! We should not then have to bewail the fact that there are no longer schools for young actors and actresses to serve, as it were, a proper apprenticeship by playing every line of character in the theatrical pharmacopœia, from farcical comedy to high tragedy, under the direction of an able stage-manager, before settling on the branch of art in which to seek and work for future excellence; just as a general practitioner, after studying the anatomy of the entire human frame, becomes a specialist.

My mother wished me to be a comedy actress,

and so to that end she and I worked very hard every day in a little quiet room at the back of the house we lodged in, and where she taught me how valuable and how necessary was the knowledge of elocution. Some of the counsel of those years gone by I repeated, almost word for word, in Mr. Burnand's little play, *A Lesson*. With her help and instruction ever before me, I toiled on with a determination to earn a high position. In country theatres young actors were frequently called upon, through illness or other causes, to play parts quite beyond their power and much beyond their years. I may say that during my provincial life, young as I was, I was made Jack-of-all-trades, acting anything and everything. Once at a minor country theatre during the Bristol vacation, a 'star' actor, well known in those days, came down for a short period, and commenced the engagement as Claude Melnotte in the *Lady of Lyons*. The actress who was to have played his widowed mother was taken ill, and there being no one else in the theatre to do it, I was told to study the part in a few hours, and do the best I could with it. The prompter rehearsed the scenes with the company, and the Claude Melnotte, who was at least old enough to be my father, was not aware of his mother's age until he met her on the stage at night. I had on a gray wig which was too big for me, and would keep slipping on one side, crowned, as it was, by a tall mob-cap. The effect must have been comical, because the moment I was discovered the audience

began to titter. Some one from the wings called out, 'Put your cap straight; it is all on one side.' In my effort to do so, I conclude I must have disturbed the gray wig, for the laughter of the audience told me that something was wrong. On came Claude. He began with the well-known line, 'Give me joy, dear mother; I have won the prize!' His eyes met mine, and he muttered, 'Who's this?' My miserable attempt to look old, and my small voice calling him 'my son,' so upset him that he was almost speechless. After our first scene was over, he said angrily, 'What does this mean? the whole piece is destroyed.' I was frightened, but explained as well as I could; and seeing my distress, he said, 'Well, my dear, it is not your fault; but surely they might have got some one to look more like my mother. I quite dread the next scene.' However, when we came to it, I got through pretty well, until Pauline had to say, 'Don't weep, mother!' which was greeted with 'Oh's!' When Claude was about to rush out, and I exclaimed, 'Claude, Claude, you will not desert your poor old mother! no divorce can separate a mother from her son!' the audience could restrain themselves no longer, and burst into a loud roar. No more dialogue was heard. Claude, in his embrace, gave me an angry push, which sent my gray wig and mob-cap almost into the orchestra. The curtain fell amidst shouts of laughter, and calls for 'Claude's mother'; to which, let me add, I did not respond.

It was during my stay at Bristol that Mr. Charles Dillon came to play Belphegor, and I was chosen to act the part of the boy Henri, his son; when I rehearsed it, I did so as my mother had taught me, in a natural manner; but Mr. Dillon disapproved, and said, 'This won't do, my dear; you'll kill the piece, and destroy *me!* When I find that my wife, your mother, whom we both adore, has deserted us in our poverty to go away with some one who can give her wealth and luxury, I call upon you to curse her; then my conscience rebukes me, my love overpowers me, and I say to you, "No, no, pray for her—pray for your mother, Henri; pray for her, my boy!" you are overwhelmed with grief, you fall on your knees, look up, and clasp your hands in prayer. Imagine you are saying, "God bless my dear mother, and bring her back to me."' I replied, 'Yes, Mr. Dillon, that is what I was doing; only I can't *imagine* my tears and prayer—I must mean it and cry in earnest.' He answered, 'Yes; but you interrupt *me*. I have to look dazed, stagger to the door, look into the empty room, and faintly mutter, "Madeline! my wife—my wife!" as the curtain falls. All this is very important, so you must be careful, and not say things audibly that take away the attention of the audience; you can mean your grief, but keep it to yourself.' I said, 'Well, but you are going to say things audibly, and beautifully you do it, for you make me cry; surely if my sobs and prayers are faintly heard through your speech it must help you,

and it will be natural. I feel the scene so real that it *makes* me cry. Let me try it again to-morrow at rehearsal; we will ask Mr. Chute to be present, and if he says it is not effective, I will act it as you wish.' He looked wonderingly at me, and then, with a smile, said, 'You are a strange little creature; but it shall be so; the manager shall decide.' So we had our rehearsal, and the scene affected Mr. Chute to tears. He said that if acted in that way it would cause a sensation. When the night came the applause was tremendous, and the success assured.

Mr. Dillon's Belphegor was a truly fine performance, and he admitted that my rendering of Henri materially assisted his acting; but I nearly lost the part through his first want of confidence in me. After the performance Mr. Dillon said, 'Good girl! If ever I have a London theatre, I shall give you an engagement.' Very soon after this he kept his word, for he became manager of the Lyceum, and sent me an offer to play my old part. Mr. Chute strongly advised my mother to accept it, as he thought this a splendid opportunity for me, and that he should expect great things of me in the future. So frightened was I at the bare thought of appearing in London, that I told Mr. Chute, if he would only give me *ever* so little more salary, I would remain at Bristol. But he, knowing that it was important for me to make a successful *début* in London, and believing also that I should take a step up the ladder of fame as Belphegor's son, out of kindness refused.

I thought it mean of him at the time, but I have thanked him since. He knew that a chance like this might never, or for a long time at least, befall me again.

When he bade me good-bye he said, 'Have courage. If you fail, and are not happy, come back to Bristol.'

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG DAYS AT THE LYCEUM, THE HAYMARKET, AND THE ADELPHI.

How big London seemed to me! I felt as if the houses were going to fall on us; and in the vast city, with so much going on, there seemed to be no room for me. A restless, crowded, get-one-before-the-other city, I felt it an impertinence to try for a place in its rushing stream of humanity. So full, and yet to us so empty, for my mother and I were without a soul to advise or a friend to help us, having left my father at Bristol. My salary was to be three pounds a week; of course things were cheaper then than they are now, or I don't know what we should have done. When I went to the first rehearsal everything around me looked so grand that I felt quite ashamed of my poor country clothes. Some of the people looked me up and down with a kind of sneer, wondering, I dare say, where I and my clothes had been picked up, and as if it were presumption for me to stand too near them. I had never seen so many people all at once upon a

stage before; but I felt as solitary and chilled as a room in winter seems without a fire in it. My mother, in former years, had known two members of the company; but as we were down in the world they did not care to recognise us. They all seemed to know one another, and I envied them as I watched them chatting together. I felt nervous and shy, and kept close to my mother's side, who every now and then whispered some tender words to give me courage. I will ask the reader to imagine for an instant our two lone figures standing apart from everybody, when a friendly smile would have put a little sun into our hearts. At last my name was suddenly called out, and I felt as if I had been shot! My mother said, 'Go forward, dear, and show yourself.' I did go forward, and made about as much sensation as a pin would in falling on a haystack. I was glad to get away, and on the road home I remarked, 'They must all have larger salaries than mine, mother, they are dressed so well.' She laughed, and said, 'They are established favourites, you see. You will one day earn a large salary too; and remember, should you then ever see a stranger poorly dressed, waiting and wishing for a kind word, don't turn away, but hold out a helping hand if you can.' I looked at her, saw the tears in her eyes, and understood her meaning.

We found lodgings just over Waterloo Bridge; our rooms were humble, but my mother was a good manager, and, as usual, kept up a comfortable little

home on our slender means. I was at rehearsal every morning, and gradually became more accustomed to the large theatre and its surroundings. The stage-manager was one of those who had known my parents in the country some years before. When he was in needy circumstances they had often helped him, and my mother had nursed him through an illness. 'Go to him,' she said; 'tell him whose daughter you are, and he will be kind to you, I'm sure.' I *did* go to him, and I *did* tell him who I was. He laughed and said, 'Well, what of that?' I could not answer, as I knew no more, so I returned to my place, blushing and ashamed. He was always harsh to me, calling me to account for every small mistake in the roughest way. He knew that I was nobody, and I suppose presumed upon it.

Let me revert to a happier memory. It was at the Lyceum that I first became acquainted with Mr. J. L. Toole, who, although he had acted before in London, had still his fame to make, and was engaged for the comic part of Fanfaronade in *Belphegor*. During the rehearsals he would often cheer me up with some kindly joke, and constantly after the second act (in which was my principal scene) he would whisper, with a merry smile, 'Twenty pounds a week insisted upon, I think, after the first appearance.'

Greatly to my relief, during the rehearsals of *Belphegor* my *un*amiable stage-manager was taken ill, and for days was unable to attend them. Oh, joy,

he was ill, and we rehearsed without him! All then went smoothly; Mr. Dillon was so kind and encouraging that I went home rejoicing, hoping that the illness might last until the first night was over; but my enemy came back in three days, and I am uncharitable enough to own that never was I so sorry to hear of a recovery. However, when he again raised his voice to object, Mr. Dillon came to the rescue, and saved me from further trouble on that head.

It was entirely through an accident—how often do they govern the chief events in life!—that I first acted in London in burlesque. One morning during a rehearsal, news came that the young lady who was cast for Perdita, the little milkmaid in William Brough's extravaganza of *A Winter's Tale*, in which Toole played Autolycus, which was to be produced with *Belphegor*, had been taken ill, so Mrs. Dillon came hurriedly to me with the part, saying, 'My dear child, we are in a fix; I know the notice is short, but you must do it.'

I had to learn both words and music in a few days. Knowing something of music, I found but little difficulty so far; but my voice was poor and thin, and remembering the largeness of the theatre, and how particular a London audience was, I was terribly nervous, and feared, if I failed, to destroy any favourable effect I might produce in *Belphegor*. My troubles were not lessened when I was told that I must provide my own dress. Where, oh, where

was it to come from? my poor three pounds a week not having begun yet. I went home with the dreadful news to my mother, who, after considering a while, said in her comforting way, 'I can manage something out of material which I have by me; study your part, think only of that, and I will make your dress myself.'

Oh, my mother! when I look back upon those struggling days, I feel that I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for all your forbearance, your fortitude, your patience; what could I have done, but for you? I was informed next day that my boots must be pale pink silk, to match the stockings. I could see that very little would be left out of my first salary; but it was useless to fret, so I went off to a shop where they were in the habit of making stage-boots, and boldly ordered mine, but was politely informed that as I was a stranger I must pay for them in advance. My mother and I went out together on a voyage of discovery, but at every likely shop we entered we were told that the time was too short, and that they would cost—oh! well, ever so much more than we could afford.

We were in despair, and going home with heavy hearts, when, with a sigh, I looked into the window of a little insignificant shop in the Waterloo Road, with great heavy ugly boots big enough for me to live in and receive friends. My mother smiled at my stopping even to look at these thick, clod-hopping things, and said, 'Come home, dear; we must

search again to-morrow.' I made up my mind suddenly to go into the shop—something seemed to urge me. I told my mother so. She remarked that it was indeed a forlorn hope; but having a strong dash of my father's bright nature in me, always hoping for the best, I said, 'Who knows? In the most unlikely place, and at the most unexpected moment, I may be successful. I'll try, mother; wish me luck!' In I went, and asked the man if he had such a thing as a pair of pale-pink silk boots. I had asked the same question so often, that I stumbled over the words. The man said, in a loud, common voice, 'No, no; we don't make your fancy fal-lals here. You must go to the West End for those dandified goods; we don't wear them in the Waterloo Road.'

I was about to leave the shop, thinking how foolish I must look, when a woman's voice from the inner room called out, 'I say, stop, miss!'—here she appeared—'did I 'ear yer say yer wanted a pair of pale pink silk boots? Well, I believe I 'ave the very thing.' The husband said, 'Why, what are you talking about?' She went on as though he had not spoken. 'There was a little girl what was to 'ave acted a fairy at the Surrey more nor a year ago; 'er mother and 'er lodged 'ere. The poor little thing took ill, and 'er mother put 'er into a horspital, and left these lodgings; she asked me to buy the boots, and, in fact, all 'er things, as she couldn't now use them. So I bought them from

'er, and sold them agin to another party—all but the boots, for they said they was too small for anyone they knew. 'Ere, Billy! bring them pink boots down from out of the back room: you'll find 'em wrapped up in soft paper on the top shelf in the cupboard. I'm afraid, though, they'll be too small for you, but you can see them.'

How I prayed that those boots might fit! The clouds seemed to be lifting. Down came Billy with the boots: they were tried on—they fitted me as if they had been made for me. Billy was very dirty, but I could have kissed him. Stay! I had not yet asked the price. I tremblingly said, 'How much?' The woman hesitated, reflected, scratched her head, and then rested her chin in her hand, gazing down at the boots, while I tremblingly waited for the verdict. 'Well, they're no use to me, 'anging about 'ere; you may 'ave them for three-and-sixpence.' I went to the door, called my mother, who was startled by my excited manner, and came hurriedly to me.

'Give me three-and-sixpence, mother.' 'What for?' 'The boots! Pale pink silk! Just what I wanted! Fit me beautifully! Belonged to a little girl! Three-and-sixpence!' I gasped all this out, for I was excited, and out of breath, and hardly knew what I was doing. I held my treasured parcel to my heart as I went gaily home, and dreamt of nothing that night but pink silk boots! I felt so happy next morning, and trotted over Waterloo Bridge to rehearsal with a merry, light heart, feeling

even strong enough to brave the stage-manager! I sang the music correctly, but my small voice could scarcely be heard with a large band.

My stage-manager stopped me. 'Come, come! this won't do! You don't call that singing, do you? Louder! louder!' I tried it louder, and my voice cracked. He stopped me again, and said, 'My dear young lady, if you don't sing better than this, you must be taken out of the part.' Upon which there was a flutter amongst the other young actresses who were standing about, each one hoping to be called upon to play it, when suddenly the musical director, who saw my troubled face, stopped the band, and said to my *bête noire*: 'Are you the musical director here, sir, as well as the stage-manager? Allow me to know whether Miss Wilton is right or wrong. Her voice is not strong, but it is true to time and tune; and I wish I could say the same for everyone concerned in the piece' (a movement of approval from the orchestra). 'Now, Miss Wilton, you are too much distressed to sing again this morning, so we will miss your duets, and try them again to-morrow; when your part of the music comes, the band shall be more piano, and then you will be heard beautifully. We'll astonish them yet.' The tears rolled down my cheeks, and my heart was too full to speak. My kind friend! how I looked for a smile from him whenever I came upon the stage! When I had to sing, he took up his violin, following and supporting my

voice, and helping me on by hiding my shortcomings. His words of comfort and encouragement made me feel safe. I record my champion's name, W. H. Montgomery, with a strong feeling of gratitude. At the night rehearsal I was much applauded by the gentlemen in the orchestra, and kind-hearted little Toole, with a comic chuckle, said, in his own quaint way, 'I don't think poor Bristol will see you again in a hurry.'

At last the opening night arrived; the house was crammed, and when Mr. Dillon as Belphegor, Mrs. Dillon as Madeline his wife, with a little girl in the cart, Toole at the back of it, beating a drum, and I seated like a boy on the horse, came on to the stage, there was a tremendous reception—such cheering, of course for Mr. Dillon; the rest of us being more or less unknown. I had little or nothing to say on my first appearance; but the supper scene which followed went off wonderfully well, Toole making the people scream with laughter, and becoming a great success before he had been many minutes on the stage. At the end of the act, where my best scene occurred with Mr. Dillon, the applause was tremendous, and there was a great call. I waited, hoping and expecting to be taken before the curtain by Mr. Dillon; but my friend the stage-manager turned round to me sharply, saying, 'Now then, Miss Wilton, go to your room; you are not wanted.' I walked slowly away towards the dressing-rooms; Mr. Dillon came off. I listened.

Another loud call; he went on again and again, each time alone. I reached my room, where my mother was anxiously waiting to know how I had succeeded, and determined not to let her see how distressed I was, I laughed and said, 'All right, mother; it has gone beautifully.' 'Were you called before the curtain?' she asked. I was on the point of replying, when the call-boy came running along the corridor, shouting, 'Miss Wilton! Miss Wilton —make haste! Mr. Dillon says you must go on before the curtain.' Away I went, almost on wings, in case I should be too late, and heard the welcome sound from the public: 'Miss Wilton! Miss Wilton!' I went on *alone*—my little figure on that big stage, with no one by my side, and no one's hand to help me. The audience called me a second time, and as I was about to answer it, my dear stage-manager pulled me back, saying, 'That will do; we shall never get the piece over if this is allowed to go on.' I ran to my room, threw my arms round my mother's neck, and said, 'A great success, mother; kiss me!' When the play was over, Mr. and Mrs. Dillon patted me on the head approvingly, and said how pleased they were.

As Perdita, I looked very nice, I think, with my hair hanging loosely over my shoulders, a pretty wreath of blush roses, a charming little dress of white cashmere, which my mother made, a bunch of roses at my waist, pale pink silk stockings, *and* the boots! I had a charming reception when I re-

appeared, and the audience was kind and encouraging. When I sang with that delightful actress, Mrs. Mellon, who played Florizel, the duet, 'Oh, my heart goes pit-a-pat,' it did indeed go pit-a-pat, for I was acting and singing with one of the greatest favourites on the London stage. The tune, which was charming, soon became very popular on the street-organs. When the piece came to an end I was called again before the curtain, and had flowers enough thrown to me to fill my little green and silver milk-pail: I felt that I had made a success, although some of the ladies told me not to feel too certain about it, as the critics often condemned what an audience had praised. We were all told to be at the theatre on the following morning for some alterations. I was terribly anxious to see the newspapers, but I was afraid, and so went to the theatre without knowing positively what impression I had made. The moment I arrived there the people flocked to congratulate me, seizing my hands, and overpowering me with praise. I looked for the leader of the orchestra, my friend when I most needed one; I wanted *his* congratulations. He came to me with an armful of newspapers, saying, 'Here, my dear; take these and be happy.' As soon as I could I ran home. How my dear mother and myself then read over and over again those criticisms! I could hardly eat anything all day.

The following encouraging words from the *Morning Post*, it may be guessed, were highly valued by

me: 'Miss M. Wilton is a young (apparently *very* young) lady quite new to us, but her natural and pathetic acting as Henri, the son of Belphegor, showed her to possess powers of no ordinary character, which fully entitled her to the recalls she obtained at the end of the second act. She appeared also as Perdita, the Royal Milkmaid, and made still further inroads in the favour of the audience; indeed, anything more dangerous to throw in the way of a juvenile prince it were difficult to imagine. She is a charming *débutante*, who hails from Bristol. She sings prettily, acts archly, dances gracefully, and is withal of a most bewitching presence.'

Well, that was my first appearance in London. My dear friend Mr. Toole, who also then acted for the first time at the Lyceum, was exceedingly nervous; but amidst all his anxiety about his own success, he never forgot to say a few cheery words to me. I must here tell a little story to show how he had already learnt the art of playing a joke. He asked me one evening if it were true that my birthday was very near, and when I told him the date he carefully wrote it down. Two or three nights later he said that he had lost the memorandum, but would I tell him again? I did so. The next night he sent word by my dresser that he wished to speak to me. By-and-by he followed me to the door of my room, and said, 'Dear little Marie, you will consider me very stupid, but for the life of me I can't remember that date you gave me; I left the

memorandum in my pocket last night, and now I can't find it. Would you mind telling me again?' I replied laughingly, 'Why, it's to-morrow.' 'Good gracious!' he exclaimed, 'how lucky it is that I asked you! good-night.' I remarked to my mother, 'I fancy Mr. Toole is going to give me something very nice for a birthday present; he seems so anxious to be correct about the day.' The next night he knocked at my dressing-room door and asked for me. He said a few kind words, and handed me a parcel carefully sealed up. I at once began to open it; paper wraps, one after another, were torn off, and still I did not get to the end of them. I felt sure that, in his love for a bit of fun, he had placed a small trinket in several folds of paper in order to work me up to the highest pitch of excitement, and then to astonish me with a pretty ornament of some sort. I was beginning to feel weary of unfolding wrap after wrap. At last the end seemed to be approaching. What could it be? The final package was carefully sealed. I paused to speculate on its contents; the parcel was round—perhaps a bracelet; but it yielded to pressure. 'It's something alive!' I dropped it; it rolled. 'I dare not open it; something will jump out.' I stood on a chair, frightened out of my wits, and made my dresser undo the parcel. A dead silence; several more pieces of pink tissue-paper. Oh, the suspense! It is something wrapped up in wool; it must be a tiny bracelet. I'll please him by wearing it on the stage; only

right, of course, that I should, after his kind remembrance of my birthday. What is it? A Tangerine orange! I wanted to laugh, but my tears wouldn't let me; when the terrible feeling of disappointment had passed, I fully enjoyed the joke.

Mr. Toole rarely omits to this day, whenever I visit his theatre, to send me round a package of sweetmeats in remembrance of his first birthday present.

My next part at the Lyceum was 'Serena, the little fairy at the bottom of the sea,' in *Conrad and Medora;* then I had a small part called Lemon-drop in a capital farce written by Edmund Yates. He gave me kindly praise, and said it was a *sweet* performance, although a lemon-drop, and he was sure there was a bright career before me.

I should have been miserable in that theatre but for Mr. Toole and my musical friend, who never failed to help me in my songs and duets. I only made a moderate success in the new burlesque, for I had but little to do, and felt out of it somehow. Soon afterwards *Virginius* was produced, and when it had been played a few nights, Mrs. Dillon, who played Virginia, was taken ill, and I was told that I must take the part. I sat up till a late hour working at it, and got through it tolerably well. Mr. Dillon was very pleased with me, and said, 'You must study parts like this; you have a pretty natural style of acting, and I should like to see you one day play Juliet.' I told him I had played it when I was

quite a child; and he replied, 'Oh! those are exhibitions I would rather not witness; I am glad I was not present.' I didn't like this remark at the time, but have often thought since how right he was.

About this time one of the dramatic critics—my impression is that I owed the kindness to my old friend Mr. John Hollingshead, who then wrote in that capacity—remarked upon a trick I had of always using my right arm with a jerk, as if it were hung on hinges, and that I ignored the possession of a left arm at all. I was much teased also about this peculiarity by members of the company, who would give imitations of it, which, if correct, must have been very ungraceful; and I was at my wit's end to know what to do to break myself of it, for I had tried and failed over and over again. One day I took a four-wheeled cab, and just as the man was about to shut the door, in desperation I put my right arm in the way, and so injured it that I was obliged to carry it in a sling for some days; but I cured myself of my bad habit, for the left arm was brought into practice; and by the time the injured limb was well, the ugly jerky action was an eccentricity of the past.

Mr. Webster, who was then lessee of the old Adelphi Theatre, offered me an engagement at a salary of five pounds a week, which I accepted; but, as this was not to commence for three months, it allowed me to accept another offer for a little time which Mr. Buckstone made me for the Haymarket.

I was not sorry to leave the Lyceum, as I saw little prospect of making progress there; and my friends in the theatre were not numerous. Mr. and Mrs. Dillon were always kind, and I liked them both; but managers cannot be responsible for malice. I was more fortunate at the Haymarket, and met with every consideration and encouragement from the company, one and all. Dear old Mr Chippendale was the stage-manager, who encouraged and helped me whenever he could. What a change for me!

I made my appearance as Cupid in an extravaganza written by the accomplished and delightful Frank Talfourd, and described by him as 'An Entirely New Classical Love Story, originally suggested by Ovid, under the name, or rather *apple*-ation, of Atalanta, or the three Golden Apples.' I made a decided hit in my part, and was very happy; my share in the music, too, was successful; my voice, I fancy, grew stronger as my heart grew lighter.

Very soon after this, I met my recent foe, the Lyceum stage-manager, at a book-shop in the Strand; he held out his hand to me, and, with a large smile (he was a big man), greeted me with, 'Well, my dear child, you are getting on rapidly, and I congratulate you.' I could not take his hand, but glared at him, and could feel myself getting red with passion. The remembrance of the indignities which he had made me suffer mounted to my face, and I said, 'Sir, you almost broke my heart at a time when I sorely needed help and support; now that I am successful,

and beyond your reach, you can offer me your hand in friendship. I refuse to take it.' I put all the dignity into this speech at my command (it was not much). But he only laughed, and answered, 'Oh, my dear little God of Love, don't be severe.' We never met again. I have long ago forgiven, but have not forgotten him.

After this I will leave a subject which is not interesting to the outside world; but were I to relate at length many cruel landmarks in my early career, I should probably be accused of exaggeration; so perhaps it is better to bury them in the past, though the remembrance of them makes me feel, at times, a little bitter, in spite of myself. Had it not been for a dogged determination to work on, and succeed in spite of them, I scarcely know where I should be now. But '*Perseverando*' is the Wilton motto, and although it was almost extinguished in my father's case, it rose from its ashes again in mine.

My engagement at the Haymarket was during some of the brightest days of the old company, and my short stay made me regret that I had not the advantage of acting in the comedies that were played there so perfectly.

Frank Talfourd was a man of very delicate constitution, and was constantly upbraided by his friends for not taking more care of himself. One very bleak cold day he was met in the Strand by his brother author, Robert Brough, who was so distressed to see that Talfourd was not wrapped up,

that he told him in strong terms how wrong it was to himself, and how unkind to his friends. Brough insisted that he must wear thick woollen undervests, and to make sure of his doing so, took him into a neighbouring shop, and asked for some to be shown to them. The man produced samples, some of which were of a light gray colour, others brown. Talfourd ordered some light ones, when the assistant shook his head. 'I should prefer the brown, sir, if I were you.' 'Why?' asked Talfourd; 'are they better made, or of finer material?' 'No, sir,' was the answer; 'they are all equal in quality.' 'Then why do you so strongly recommend the brown ones?' 'Well, sir,' said the man, indicating the gray vests, '*those* will want washing *sometimes*;' then pointing earnestly to the brown vests, he exclaimed, 'but *these*——!' Frank Talfourd loved to tell this story.

A little romance occurred to me early in the run of *Atalanta*, which resulted, I am sorry to say, in a tragic ending. I was pestered by some stupid letters full of nonsensical admiration. Their frequency at last became so annoying, the notes being accompanied by flowers with silly requests that I would wear them, that I consulted Mr. Compton, who was always most kind to me, how best to put a stop to the nuisance. In his quaint way he said, 'Some love-sick boy! but as the letters are addressed to the "Sweetest God of Love in the world," send them on to Buckstone! As for the flowers, give

them to me; I'll wear them.' He attached the bouquet to his hat, and strutted about the stage, much to my amusement, dressed as the old Pedagogue, in which he was inimitably droll. In the last scene he placed the little note that was sent with the flowers between the white feather wings which I wore as Cupid; and when I had to draw an arrow from my quiver in the business of the scene, the *billet-doux* fell to the ground, much to my confusion. Compton laughed and said, when the piece was over, 'I don't think our love-sick friend will trouble us any further.' The next night, however, he received a letter, saying, that if he only knew the misery he was causing to a poor harmless fellow, he never would have been guilty of such an unkindness. Compton inquired what sort of man brought the letter. The hall-porter answered, 'Not a man at all, sir—it was a boy.' Upon which Compton said to me, 'This is only a poor little schoolboy, after all; here are some more roses which he has sent, and begs of you to wear. Do so, my dear, to assure him that you are not offended, and the poor little fellow will go back to school rejoicing, and you will be troubled by him no more.' I did wear them, and the moment I went on to the stage there was a sound like a squeak, which came from the front of the house. It startled me, but nothing further occurred for quite two weeks, and I hoped with Compton that my youthful admirer had disappeared. One night, however, after the performance, a most

alarming letter arrived, saying that having once worn the flowers he had sent me, I had proved that the writer could not be altogether indifferent to me; adding, 'I shall be here again to-morrow night, and if you do not then wear the bouquets I shall send you, I shall wait outside the stage-door, and as you pass me in your cab, I shall shoot you dead.' My mother decided to go with me to the theatre the next night. We both consulted Mr. Compton, and he advised us to leave by the front entrance instead of the stage-door, saying that he would have the boy watched, and, if armed, give him in charge. He laughingly added, 'He is a bloodthirsty young ruffian, and his people must be communicated with at once. I little thought such trouble would come of my advice to you to wear the stupid fellow's flowers; but I expect, after a sound thrashing and a threat to put him into prison, he will disappear.' We went out the front way, and arrived home safely. On the next day we were told that no such person had been seen in Suffolk Street, and we began to think the whole affair was a hoax.

Shortly afterwards, however, an elderly lady called at our lodgings and asked if she could see me; my mother and I received her. She looked at me very hard, and said, 'I wish I could spare you the sad story I have to tell. You have lately been much annoyed by receiving letters and flowers from a young man who has constantly been to the Haymarket Theatre.' I replied, 'Yes, I have indeed; but I was

under the impression that he was merely a boy.' She continued, 'No, he is twenty-one years of age, and my son. I am a widow, and he is my only child. For some time I have noticed a strangeness in his manner. He would pace up and down his room at night talking to himself, and never seemed to sleep. I became very uneasy, and often asked him what was the matter, but he would never reply. A week ago, while he was out, I went to his room to see if I could find a clue to all this mystery. I saw a letter addressed to you, in which he threatened to do you harm if you did not wear the flowers he intended to send you. The following evening I had him detained at home, and the whole night he was raving. I am almost broken-hearted. I have consulted doctors, and my poor son is pronounced insane. He has promised that if he can hear from your own lips that you can never care for him, he will rest content and never trouble you again. Now, my dear young lady, will you grant him an interview, and in the presence of his doctor let him hear you say you cannot accept his addresses, and I shall be truly grateful.' Then turning to my mother, she said, 'I appeal to you as a mother. I am worn out with anxiety. I implore you to help me in this matter.' My mother replied, 'Of course, if we can be assured that this painful business will end here, I will consent.'

The poor lady seemed quite grateful, and after fixing a day and hour for the interview she left.

The day arrived, and at the appointed time came a loud knock. Presently the room door was opened, and in walked the poor lady, then a gentleman who, I was informed, was a 'mad' doctor, followed by a pale, fair-haired young man, with a very freckled face, and odd, light-blue eyes, which he fixed on me the moment he entered the room, and never took them away until he left the house. After him came a strange-looking man, who I distinctly remember had lost a thumb, and who was told by the doctor to sit outside the room until he was wanted. It would be very difficult for me to describe my feelings and my mother's looks; I only know that I was terribly frightened.

After a short, painful interval, the doctor spoke. 'Miss Wilton, you have for some few weeks received letters and bouquets from Mr. ——?' 'Yes.' 'You were requested in these notes to wear the flowers during the evening?' 'Yes.' 'Well, one evening you did wear them?' 'Yes; because a very touching letter was written to request me to do so to show that I was not offended with the sender, and that then he would never trouble me again.' The doctor went on: 'After that you received a threatening letter from him?' 'Yes; and it alarmed me very much.' I related the details, when the poor fellow muttered, 'I could not injure that which I loved!' My mother urged that the interview must come to an end, and the doctor then said, 'Well, Miss Wilton, you are aware that Mr. —— has promised

that if he can hear from your own lips that you cannot care for him, he will never trouble you more. He will keep his word, I know. All you have to do is to answer that question, and then we will leave you, asking you to forgive us for this intrusion; and pray believe that I am extremely sorry you should have suffered so much annoyance.'

I paused for a second; I looked at the young man's anxious but extremely plain face, and saw his eyes still fixed upon me with a look of intense sorrow and suffering. I then said, 'I can never care for this gentleman, and I ask him to trouble me no further.' The doctor turned to him and said, 'You hear?' There was then a general movement. The poor fellow came up to me, looked at me with a wild stare, and said, 'Good-bye.' He turned round, walked to the door, over which hung my portrait, gave a sort of stifled scream, exactly like the squeak I had heard in the theatre, rushed hurriedly from the room and past the man outside, who immediately ran after him as fast as his legs would take him. My mad admirer went so quickly that he pushed against the servant who was going to open the street-door for them, sent her sprawling on the floor, and ran towards Waterloo Bridge, with the man after him, the doctor after the man, and the poor old lady after the doctor. The scene I shall never forget. The carriage they came in followed, so they made altogether a very extraordinary procession. Some short time after we heard from

Mrs. —— that her son had been placed in an asylum. After another lapse of time we heard again that, as he was pronounced much better, he had been sent for a voyage to Australia with an attendant; and a few months later we were much startled and pained to hear that during the voyage he had, while his attendant was occupied for a moment in speaking to another passenger, jumped overboard and was drowned. We were all very sorry to hear such sad news of the poor fellow, for we could not help feeling interested in him. It appeared that there had been insanity in his family, and I often wondered whether his inherent madness or *my beauty* (!) was the cause of this sad episode. After a little consideration, and several references to my looking-glass, I concluded that it must have been the former.

I regretfully left the Haymarket, where I had been so happy; and I regretted it all the more when I found that I had little or nothing to do at the Adelphi. Parts were given to me utterly unsuited to me, and those only of a few lines. There were, of course, many established favourites of the public in the company. Webster—a host in himself—Wright and Paul Bedford, Madame Celeste (whom I had not met since I acted the child in the *Green Bushes* with her in a country theatre) and Mary Keeley, who inherited a share of her mother's genius, are the principal names I can recall. I had little else to do than stand at the wings and watch them, wishing that I were playing all the good parts!

Wright and Paul Bedford were always closely associated in pieces written especially to bring them together, in which Wright never missed an opportunity of introducing some fresh joke at Paul's expense, or at anyone else's. Poor Paul! He was a genial, good-tempered, kindly creature, and loved by everyone. I can see his round, red, merry face now, with his twinkling eyes, peering through the green-room doorway with his usual greeting, 'Good-morning, boys and girls! How-de-doo! how-de-do-o-o!' I once was one of a party who paid a visit to Wright at his model farm near Surbiton, which was the most complete and interesting thing of the kind I ever saw, and I remember how he imposed on my over-credulous nature by telling me, with a serious face, that all his guinea-pigs had, during the previous night, eaten off their own tails!

I was in despair of ever getting anything to do which would advance me in my profession, and implored Mr. Webster to release me from my engagement; but, although he was always kind, he insisted on keeping me to it, saying that my opportunity would come if I would only be patient.

I remember an extravaganza in which I played there, called *Cupid and Psyche.* I was again cast for Cupid, and, during the run of the piece, I fell seriously ill from severe congestion of the lungs, caused by standing in draughts under the stage while waiting for my cue to rise through trap-doors. I felt that I had played Cupid so often as to wonder whether I

was doomed to pass my professional life in appearing from unexpected and impossible places. My illness was serious, and I was obliged to resign my part for some time; no trivial matter for me, for, in those days, salaries ceased to be paid from the hour the manager was deprived of an actor's services. So long as I was well, I never felt the reality of my responsibilities at home. I worked cheerfully and with thankfulness at being able to do so much; but when I fell ill, my anxieties were terrible. It is no secret that, up to the time my sisters married, I was the main support of my family, after which they cheerfully bore their share.

Doubtless had my mind been less burdened by the terror of earning nothing, I should have recovered more quickly. One day when I had been given up by our doctor, and was lying in bed wondering what my poor mother would do without me, I opened my eyes and saw her weary face. She looked so lonely that a feeling came over me that I *must* get well. I fought against the doctor's verdict and against the moanings of the servant—a kind of moaning which is peculiar to the race, combined with the most ghastly forebodings. The maid who helped to attend me was a good creature, but seemed to feed on the horrors of the situation. She whispered in my ear, when she thought that it would all soon be over, 'May I cut off a lock of your 'air, miss, when you are gone, as a keepsake?' I was too weak to laugh or feel horrified; but it helped to give me more

strength of will. I knew how necessary I was, and, with God's help, felt I must recover. At last, after a weary time, I got strong enough to act again. I had been ordered first to the seaside to get back some health, but the chronic state of our finances would not permit the luxury.

Soon after my return to the Adelphi, an incident occurred which, I think, will be worth relating. During a rehearsal of one of my very small parts, a note was handed to me. Without looking at the superscription, I opened it and read the following: 'Mary, before it is too late, repent of your rash conduct and return to your heart-broken father and mother.' Naturally astonished at this strange request, only having left home an hour before, I handed the note to Mr. Webster, who knew my parents, and asked him to read it. He laughed and said, 'There must be some mistake. Shall I go and see what it means?' I replied, 'Do, Mr. Webster, please. I can't understand it; I must be mistaken for some one else.'

I went on with my rehearsal, and, after being absent for some little time, Mr. Webster returned, and said laughingly, 'Well, my dear, I've had a most extraordinary interview. It appears that there is some girl who has left her home and parents in Wolverhampton, and has come up to London, where her friends are searching for her everywhere. Last night, an uncle of the girl's happened to be in the pit of this theatre, and when he saw you

come on the stage he said, "There she is! I've found her at last." The man waited, it appears, until the performance was over, and then came round to the stage-door, but, as you had finished early in the piece, you had gone home. He was told this by the hall-porter, upon which he asked where you lived, which, of course, he was not told. He seemed annoyed at this refusal, said he would call again in the morning, and here he is. You had better come down with me and satisfy the man of his blunder.'

I went down, and there was a man whom I had never, to my knowledge, seen in my life. He came towards me and said abruptly, 'I have got you at last. You will please make your arrangements to come home to Wolverhampton at once; I have been a long time looking for you, and now I've got you, I don't intend to let you slip again. How you will ever be able to look your parents in the face again, I don't know.' The mystery became thicker and thicker. The more I tried to convince the man of his error, the more determined he appeared to be to take me to my 'distressed parents.' All my efforts were useless, and the stranger was so earnest in his appeal to my proper sense of feeling to give my parents no more unhappiness, but to return to them, and try, by my future conduct, to soothe their old age and heal the wound which I had so cruelly made in their hearts, that the hall-porter, overcome by the touching words, at last cried out, 'For goodness' sake, miss, go 'ome to your friends. What's all the ap-

plause you git every night compared with the 'appiness you will feel when you know you've done your *dooty?* There's nothing so 'orrible as a undutiful and ungrateful choild.' I could hardly refrain from laughing, in spite of the unpleasant nature of the interview.

Mr. Webster then told the man who I was, and how long I had been in London; that I came from Bristol, and that he had known my family for years. The poor man looked mystified, and it was arranged that I should go through my work at the theatre that night, that he would telegraph to my 'distressed parents' to come up themselves from Wolverhampton. I could only hope that something in the interim might transpire to help us. The stranger trusted to Mr. Webster's promise that we would do nothing until he called again on the following day; when, instead of appearing himself, came the joyful news that the man who so insisted on being 'my uncle' had received a letter from the father of the girl, telling him she had returned home, and asking him to go down at once to Wolverhampton. The man was most humble in his apologies. He could never forgive himself, he said, for the annoyance he had caused, and begged the 'good gentleman' (Mr. Webster) to excuse him to the young lady to whom he had been so rude, vowing that such a likeness he had never seen. The hall-porter laughed when he heard the sequel to this little drama, and said, 'I knowed he was either mad or drunk; *I* never believed

in him.' How clever he was, that hall-porter! No more of my double was heard, and the incident, which seemed only trifling, soon passed from my thoughts; but later in my life I have sometimes wondered if this evidently strange resemblance had any connection with an even stranger episode to be related further on in this book.

The season was drawing to a close, and, alas! I was only just where I began. I was ambitious to make a position in which I could command a good salary and be somebody besides, for I was getting weary of being little more than nobody, when Fortune, who has ever been my good friend, came to my help. It was decided to pull the old Adelphi down, and build what was the foundation of the present handsome theatre in its place; this set me free, and I signed an engagement with Miss Swanborough to appear shortly under her management at the Strand Theatre. An offer also came from my dear old Bristol manager, to go there for a fortnight to play Cupid. Cupid again! My friends had begun to tease me about playing so many Cupids, declaring that I must have been born with wings, and could do nothing else. I gladly accepted Mr. Chute's offer, and went down to Bristol; and delighted I was to see all my old friends there again.

The most important episode of a romance in my life (which I once told in the Christmas number of a magazine) occurred at Bristol; and this visit to the old city strongly revived my remembrance of it,

although the sequel, which I will relate here, did not really happen until later on, when I was acting at the Strand Theatre. Attractions must have been at a very low ebb, when the manager of a small country theatre where I was acting soon after I left Manchester conceived the idea of my playing Juliet. I am thankful that such things never occur now. The manager explained to the public that the Italian Juliet was but little older than I, and that in southern climes girls were marriageable at a very early age.

I was a pale, thin, delicate-looking child, and tall for my age. Everyone thought at that time that I should, if I lived, be a remarkably fine woman; but since playing Juliet on that memorable first occasion, I have not grown an inch, and sometimes think that my tragic efforts gave as great a shock to my system as to my audience.

Often on my way to and from our rehearsals, when I had time to loiter, I stopped at a window in the little High Street, and longingly looked at a necklace of pearl beads, marked five shillings—a fortune to me then. I saved until I had half a crown, and then tried to induce the shopman to let me have it for that price; but I failed. My father promised to buy me the treasure if I would be very good, and study Juliet. How readily I said 'Yes;' for the labour of learning the words, and being taught by my mother how to speak them, seemed light indeed, compared with the joy of possessing those little pearl beads.

The night arrived for the 'great dramatic event' (*vide* advertisements). My mother could scarcely dress me, her hands trembled so. I could not help wondering why she should be so anxious. I was not. I was of that happy age that knows no responsibility. I had on a pretty white dress, trimmed with narrow silver lace, my hair hanging in large waves over my shoulders; and best adornment of all was my beautiful pearl necklace. Oh! how everyone would envy me those beads!

All went well until the fourth act, when, in throwing my head back to drink the poison, my long train, which I wore for the first time in my life, and which had been a great anxiety to me all through the play, got entangled in my feet; and, in the effort to save myself from falling, my necklace gave way, and the beads were scattered about in all directions. I looked scared for a moment; but when I fully realized that it was broken, I fell to crying so bitterly that I thought my heart would break too. I sank on to the couch, sobbing piteously. The audience thought this a good piece of acting, and gave me great applause.

In the greatest grief, and with stifled sobs, I went through the last act. When I fell on Romeo's body there was great applause; but in the middle of Friar Laurence's last speech, I saw some of my beads lying close to his feet. His treading upon them seemed imminent; so, forgetting that I was supposed to be dead, I got up and rescued them, and then lay

down again. Of course, the rest of Friar Laurence's speech was not heard, and the curtain fell amidst loud laughter. I had a good scolding from father, mother, and manager, who hoped that if I ever again played Juliet I should think more of the part than of the ornaments.

As we were leaving the theatre, my eyes swollen from crying over the injured necklace, a gentleman who had witnessed the performance and the scene stepped up to us, and said, 'I hope you will pardon me for speaking to you; my name is Captain ——. Let me tell you how much I have been impressed by your little daughter's acting as Juliet; it really was, for one so young, very remarkable. Take care of her, sir; there is a bright career before her. Good-night. Good-night, little one!' He shook my hand, and asked me if I would give him the remnant of my broken necklace, which I had so carefully rescued from destruction. I trembled at the thought of parting with it; but my mother whispered to me, 'I am going to buy you another.' So I gave it. On our way home we talked of nothing else—my father dwelling on the criticism, and I on the final disappearance of my necklace.

For many and many a night I quite looked for my 'prophet;' but he had gone as mysteriously as he came. Often on our way home had I said, 'We have never seen that kind gentleman since; I seem to miss him somehow. Will his words ever come true, I wonder?'

Some time after, at Bristol, and as I was leaving the theatre with my mother, who should step up to us but my 'prophet.' We both recognised him at once. I was delighted; but my mother feared that his admiration of me as a child *might* grow into something more serious, and she therefore did not receive him with that warmth she otherwise might have done. He said, 'Well, little one, you see I was right; you are going up the ladder step by step. Mark my words, the next one will be London.'

My heart jumped at the sight of this man; there was a kind of mystery about him. He seemed to be mixed up with my life somehow; and whatever part of importance I played, I always thought of him and of his kind words. He showed me the string of pearls, and said, 'You see how I have treasured these. I don't intend to part with them. I shall never give them back to you unless you ask me for them.' How different were my feelings for those pearls now! It seemed like taking away my heart when he first asked me for them; and now, unknown to myself, he *had* taken it away.

Every night during his short stay he sat in a corner of the dress-circle, and at the end of the play would show me the pearl beads. He would wait sometimes outside the stage-door, just to press my hand, and say, 'Good-night, little one.' He had not time to say more; for my mother used to sit at the window of our lodgings, which were opposite, to see me come home.

I was now in love for the very first time in my life. How everything else in the whole world suddenly dwindled into nothing! Father, mother, sisters, theatres, acting—all seemed to be shut out by a curtain, and only one being was in view. There was nothing in this man to attract a girl of my age. He was not young, not what is called good-looking, and was poor; but what was this to me? All the nicest people were poor, and I didn't care. But I had never had an opportunity of telling him all this, for my mother had declined to encourage his visits; and so he kept away, and never tried to see me, except for one moment to say, 'Good-night.'

One night I received a note from him, saying, 'Good-bye. I wonder if we shall ever meet again. I shall never part with your pearls. I love you, little one. I wish you loved me; but it is better for you that you should not.' This was the first opportunity he had ever given me of telling him how much I loved him, and I was resolved to take it.

I gave the note to my mother, and implored her to let me see him. She refused, saying I was a silly girl. I fancy she said a fool; but I was too agitated to remember.

'How can you think seriously of such a mysterious person?' Mysterious! she would not give him a chance of being anything else. 'Surely,' she continued, 'you cannot wish to destroy all your pro-

fessional prospects! Let me hear no more of this nonsense! Thank goodness he is gone, and you will forget him in a few days.'

'Forget him! and in a few days! Oh, mother!' I knew his address in Ireland; and, after vainly trying to follow my mother's counsel, I wrote to him, saying that I loved him more than anything else in the world, and that if he really cared for me as much, I would run away, and go to him; that if I did not marry him, I would marry no one else; that I could not study; that I could do nothing but think of him. He replied that it seemed hard to take me from a profession in which I was destined to shine; that he should for ever reproach himself if I regretted, when too late, the step I had taken; that his love and empty pockets would be but a miserable return for the sacrifice I should make. He begged me to reflect. I did; and the more I reflected, the more determined I became, and I told him so. He answered that he would not fight with his feelings any longer; that he was sure, when once we were married, my mother would soon forgive us.

And so it came about that I was to start on a certain day. All was settled. I was to receive the final letter with instructions, and the money for my journey. I thought the day would never come. Time seemed to creep, and not to fly. But as the day drew nearer and nearer, my heart, which had been so light and joyful, began to beat with a heavier thud. There was a kind of fear—a wish to run

away from myself; for I felt afraid of myself—my head and my heart began to argue.

On the night before I was to leave my home, I returned from my work at the theatre. I found my mother waiting supper for me as usual. I could not eat; I was nervous and thoughtful. My mother asked me if I was ill; or had I been annoyed at the theatre? I shook my head. I could not trust myself to speak. When she kissed me, and said, 'Good-night; God bless you!' I whispered to myself, 'Will He bless me to-morrow?' The words fell from her lips like a reproach; for although she said them to me every night, they never seemed to mean so much before—they never set me thinking as they did that night.

When I was alone in my little bedroom, I fell on my knees, and prayed to God to help me and to guide me, for my heart was full of doubt. I felt how I was deceiving my dear mother, to whom I owed everything—who had taught me, who had worked with me, and who was now dependent upon me. If I went away, what would become of her and my young sisters? How I wept and prayed that night! I implored God to help me in my trouble, and to give me some warning in my dreams. I cried myself to sleep, but awoke several times. I heard the church-bell toll four, six, and eight. Still no warning dream. I tried to think that perhaps my going would be for the best, or I should have surely dreamt something; and I felt a little happier

as I lay thinking. Half-past eight was the post-time, and I had told the servant to bring any letters there might be for me to my room.

The half-hour struck. I heard the postman's knock. My heart seemed to stop beating. I heard the girl on the stairs. I could scarcely breathe. A knock at the door. This was the final letter. I jumped out of bed, and as I crossed the room to open the door, a voice, as if in great haste, said quickly, 'Don't go.'

God alone knows what my feelings were at that moment. Never, never, to my dying day, shall I forget it. A thrill, first of awe and terror, then of thankfulness, came over me. I fell on my knees, and said, 'I won't go.' The servant impatiently pushed the letter under the door. I opened it. There were the final instructions—how he would meet me on the journey, and the money for my expenses. I threw on my dressing-gown, sat down, and wrote these words: 'Don't expect me, I cannot go. I have changed my mind.' I enclosed the money, and sent the letter to the post. I gave a sigh of relief, lay down on the bed, and cried bitterly.

One morning, during breakfast, a few weeks later, my mother (who up to this time knew nothing of my little story) handed me the newspaper, and with a smile of satisfaction pointed to the marriage column. He had married! I threw my arms around my mother's neck, had a good cry, and told her everything.

The words of my 'prophet' were fulfilled; I was acting in a London theatre. Whenever I made a success, I thought of his kind words, and remembered how I had grown to love him at last.

One day I was walking slowly up Regent Street, when I stopped, without knowing why, at the Carrara-marble works. Serious thoughts came over me as I contemplated the head-stones and monuments, and as I turned from them with a sigh, a voice by my side said, in a low tone, 'Well, my faithless little one.' I turned, and saw my 'prophet.' My first instinct was to run away, but my legs would not move.

'You see,' he said, 'what came of your suddenly changing your mind. I revenged myself and got married. How cruel you were!' He told me that he had married a rich woman who had been a widow just a year, within a month from my refusal. After thinking to myself that widows lost no time in settling their affairs, I told him the story of my warning, and he seemed much impressed by it. He answered, 'It was, I am sure, a timely warning, for we should have been very poor. It would have been a dreary life for you, and much too big a sacrifice, with all your bright prospects. I am now a widower, with one little child. My wife died a year after our marriage. I am rich now, and can return to my old young love. I wonder if my little Juliet loves me still?' Yes, I did; but I was afraid to hope again, so I said, 'You had better not

see me any more; you will soon forget me.' He replied, 'Never, until Im a under one of those,' pointing to the headstones in the window. A cold chill ran through me as he said those words.

He was under orders to sail for India the following week, so no time was to be lost. He called on my mother, and asked her consent to our corresponding and to our marrying on his return to England, which would be in a year, providing she consented. My mother hesitated, but after tears and entreaties from me, and with the hope that he would marry a black woman, or that I should forget him, or that something would happen to keep him in India, she reluctantly consented. The fates seemed to will it this time, and so I was happy again.

The day came to say good-bye. He showed me the pearl necklace, saying, 'You see how I have guarded it. I will never part with it; it seems to have linked our two lives together.' I looked at the broken beads, and all the old times came back to me. There was my necklace just as I had left it, and the knot which I had made to prevent the other beads from falling off.

I somehow wished there had been no broken link, for I had begun to feel rather superstitious now about our courtship.

Every mail brought me a letter. No one ever seemed to speak such words as he did, they were so good and honest. I always felt that I could trust him, and that is why I loved him.

Six months passed, and every mail had brought me my letter. How anxiously I looked for his handwriting. At last the day came again, but no letter; the next mail arrived, and the next, but still no letter. What could it mean? My mother, smiling, said, 'Ah, my child! the old, old story; and I am not sorry.' After a few days' reflection, I began to think that she was right, and that I had been a fool; but I was very unhappy. He had seemed to be my guiding star ever since I was a little girl, and all my first and purest love was his. Oh, it was dreadful to bear!

One day, very shortly after his third letter was due, I was again in Regent Street, and thought of the day I had met him there. I was sad and miserable, but still could not help clinging to the hope of seeing him again, and that all would be explained. Perhaps he was coming home to surprise me. As I approached the Carrara-marble works, I hurried to the place, with a kind of superstitious feeling—having met him there so strangely before, I should perhaps as strangely meet him there again. I stopped at the old spot, waited, looked about—no, not there! Ah! I remember I was looking in at the window when he came; I will do so again. And there I saw a large white headstone, with these words:

Sacred to the Memory of

CAPTAIN ——,

WHO DIED SUDDENLY, AT KURRACHEE,

ETC., ETC.

How I got home, I know not. I found my mother in tears, reading a letter which she had received from his dearest friend, who had found my letters among his papers. He had died soon after writing to me for the last time, and my little pearl necklace was buried with him.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE STRAND THEATRE.

My acceptance of Miss Swanborough's offer was an important step in my early London career, as from its commencement until I became a manager I was chiefly associated with the Strand Theatre, and, for a long time, with a line of characters—'burlesque boys'—which, in the words of the immortal Mr. Eccles, 'was none o' my choosing.' My circumstances, however, would not permit me to pick and choose, and I was thankful for occupation which gave me the means towards supporting our home. Miss Swanborough, who had held a leading comedy position at the Haymarket, was a charming woman, and never failed in her endeavours to make the members of her company happy: to her reign of management I always look back with bright recollections. When I received the part of Pippo in the *Maid and the Magpie*, I was disappointed at its being another boy, and wrote to ask if any change could be made in the cast. Miss Swanborough kindly arranged for me to meet her as well as Mr.

Byron, whose acquaintance I thus made for the first time. He was then quite a young man, with a marked inheritance of the beauty of his great ancestor. He said he had written the part of Pippo expressly for me, and that he was distressed I did not like it. I explained that I did not wish to play burlesque boys, and that I objected to the part on that account. Miss Swanborough seemed to be perplexed and anxious, and Mr. Byron remarked that he was a young author, and my not acting Pippo would mean a serious loss to him, that there was no one else in the theatre to whom he could entrust it, and that he could 'see me in every line of it.' He added, 'I am only a beginner, you know, and this burlesque may make or mar me.' This appeal decided me; I could hold out no longer, so promised to play Pippo.

The original cast of this burlesque included Miss Maria Ternan (a very refined actress, who, a few years later, married and left the stage); Miss Oliver, already one of London's favourites, having won her laurels under Madame Vestris at the Lyceum; that splendid actress of 'old women' Mrs. Selby, as those will say whose memories will allow them to recall the *Last of the Pigtails;* Mr. James Bland, or 'Papa Bland' as he was called in the theatre, who had been so long associated with Planché's extravaganzas at the Lyceum, and had played burlesque monarchs in so many of them, that he was named 'The king of burlesque;' and Mr. John Clarke, or, more familiarly, 'Little' Clarke.

The piece proved an immense success, and as Pippo I established myself as a leading favourite in the theatre. Although not a classical boy, as Cupid was, he was still saucy and amusing, and the people loved to come to see him night after night.

Mr. Byron wrote a duet for Mr. Clarke and myself, at the end of which came a dance. It was quaint and strange, nothing very extraordinary; but it was a novel thing at that time to introduce a dance after a song or duet, and this one became the rage, as well as the *pièce de résistance* of all the hurdy-gurdies and barrel-organs of the day. Encore followed encore every night, and from that time till now no singing has been complete in a burlesque without a dance to follow.

It was not until some time later—indeed, when Forster's life of the great writer came out—that I knew the opinion Charles Dickens years before had written of this performance in a letter to John Forster, in these words:

'I escaped at half-past seven, and went to the Strand Theatre, having taken a stall beforehand, for it is always crammed. I really wish you would go, between this and next Thursday, to see the *Maid and the Magpie* burlesque there There is the strangest thing in it that ever I have seen on the stage—the boy Pippo, by Miss Wilton. While it is astonishingly impudent (must be, or it couldn't be done at all), it is so stupendously like a boy, and

unlike a woman, that it is perfectly free from offence. I never have seen such a thing. She does an imitation of the dancing of the Christy Minstrels—wonderfully clever—which, in the audacity of its thorough-going, is surprising. A thing that you *cannot* imagine a woman's doing at all; and yet the manner, the appearance, the levity, impulse and spirits of it, are so exactly like a boy, that you cannot think of anything like her sex in association with it. It begins at eight, and is over by a quarter past nine. I never have seen such a curious thing, and the girl's talent is unchallengeable. I call her the cleverest girl I have ever seen on the stage in my time, and the most singularly original.'

A circumstance comes to my mind concerning the *Maid and the Magpie*—tragic at the beginning and comic at the end—which, although it happened during its revival later on, had perhaps be better told here.

'Papa' Bland had long been known as an able actor, but when he played Fernando Villabella he was old and ailing; his memory also grew treacherous, and he became uncertain in the words he had to speak. One night, on arriving at the theatre at his usual time, he was observed to be very ill, and to stagger after getting out of his cab. He was led into the porter's hall, and within half an hour he was dead. His sad end cast a gloom over us all, for we were fond of the kindly old gentleman. There was

no one prepared to take the part of Fernando, and what was done that evening I can't remember; but Mr. Byron generously came to the rescue and played the part himself the next night, when he introduced a couplet in the scene with his daughter, played by Miss Oliver, whose name, it must be remembered, was *Martha*, although by her intimate friends she was always called *Patty*.

The burlesque had been such a success, and was so popular, that it seemed to us as if the audience, night after night, had never moved from their seats, so many faces were familiar. It will be understood by this that many frequenters of the old Strand were acquainted with every word of the piece, and whenever a new sentence was introduced or forgotten, detected it immediately. On this particular night, when Mr. Byron appeared as Fernando, he added the following lines in the scene with Miss Oliver, where, as her long-lost father, he is trying to bring himself back to her recollection :

> 'Jujubes, oranges and cakes, I too did give her,
> *Pâté de foie gras*, which means *Patty O'liver !*'

I shall never forget the laughter and chorus of 'Oh's!' that followed these lines. Neither Mr. Byron nor Miss Oliver could proceed for some time; the latter was so taken by surprise that she could hardly finish the scene.

Before I tell what else I have to say about the old Strand days, let me recall some names of prominent actresses in comedy and drama, all of whom have, at

some time in their career, acted with success in burlesque, and it may be that this sometimes abused side of stage-life has its power and value in the shape of training. Since those days, however, although burlesque may not have fallen off, certainly some of the dresses have; many of which might be described as beginning too late and ending too soon. Without searching deeply, I remember at once the names of Miss Herbert, Kate and Ellen Terry, Madge Robertson (Mrs. Kendal), Miss Cavendish, Miss Fanny Josephs, Miss Hodson, Mrs. John Wood, Mrs. Mellon, Mrs. Charles Mathews, adding, if I may, my own. While among our foreign friends I can at least mention Modjeska and Jane Hading. I have also seen our present most gifted burlesque actress, Miss Farren, act so ably and perfectly in other characters, as to cause regret that she does not give us more frequent opportunities of seeing her genuine comedy power. These are names of my contemporaries; were I to go further back, how powerfully the list might be increased!

I shall not weary the reader with a long account of all the boy-parts I played; but, as I run through the list of them, I will rather pause, when I can, to say something of somebody else.

Season after season I found myself still a boy. When I was talking with my mother one day on the subject, and wishing that I might appear as myself now and then, I exclaimed, 'Oh, dear me! Why can't I be allowed to be a girl? It's all very well to

be a great favourite with the public, and to be told that I am so natural and real in a boy's dress. Well, if so, why was I not born a boy?' My mother laughed, and bade me make the best of it.

Now and then I had a part in a comedietta given to me, and I was so successful in it that I pined more and more for that class of character. I frequently urged Mr. Byron to write a comedy and give me a part in it; he promised that if I would wait awhile he would do so. I did not object to burlesque itself, especially when he wrote it—so witty, clever, and bright; but my training and ambition had pointed to a different class of acting, and I was frightened that if I did not continue to struggle for it I should never get my chance. If I could have been sometimes cast for girls I should have grown more patient; but those Cupids had made authors think, and, perhaps, the public believe, I could not play anything but boys. I must not, however, weary my reader, as I fear I often did my manager, with my grumblings.

The next 'boy' was Sir Walter Raleigh in *Kenilworth*, in which, I remember, Miss Swanborough played Leicester for a time, and that wonderfully clever actress, Charlotte Saunders, was cast for Tresillian. She was, indeed, brimful of talent. Had she been tall, and gifted with a stronger voice, she might have been a leading actress in comedy and drama; but her figure was very short and stout, and the voice thin. There was in her acting a rich, sly

humour, and a deep appreciation of the good things she had to say, which was very infectious. I had a great admiration for her as an actress, and a sincere regard for her as a woman.

Mrs. Selby was our 'Good Queen Bess,' who made her first entrance on board a 'penny steamer.' Being a very tall, stout woman, as she stood on the paddle-box, looking bigger than the steamer, she caused great laughter; when she prepared to land, after the words 'Ease her,' 'Back her,' 'Stop her,' I, as Sir Walter Raleigh, took off my cloak and (repeating history) placed it on the ground for the Queen to stand upon. My part was by no means a long one, but I had some good things to say like the following:

> 'Because, your Majesty, should I e'er wish to pawn it,
> I'll tell my uncle I've had *a sovereign on* [*awn*] *it!*'

One night, during the run of *Kenilworth*, an unfortunate *contretemps* occurred. When Mrs. Selby appeared, a large wreath of immortelles was thrown to her by some giddy fellows from a private box. The poor lady was so upset and affected that she fainted, and it was with difficulty she managed to get through the performance. The circumstance caused a disturbance, and the offenders, who in a tipsy frolic had so forgotten themselves, were obliged to leave the theatre. The next day they had an interview with Mr. Charles Selby, when they made a humble apology, which, I believe, was published. Mrs. Selby never quite recovered from what was at the time a

severe shock to her system. She had passed a great part of her life in France, and having become imbued with superstition, could never be persuaded that the immortelles did not come as a warning of her approaching death; her fears, however, were groundless, for she lived some years after the occurrence, and became manager of the Royalty Theatre, where she produced Mr. Burnand's celebrated burlesque, *Ixion.*

John Clarke's name comes at once to my memory, not only as an old friend but as an admirable actor, who, like myself, pined for other than burlesque parts, and lived to prove the justice of his aspirations.

Next came Albert in *William Tell*, for which, I think, that inimitable comedian James Rogers (it seems so strange to call him so, for he was never known by his playmates but as 'Jimmy,' and I must beg the reader to forgive my using that familiar name) rejoined the company, for it is the first remembrance I have of the amusing scenes that happened between himself and John Clarke. Although they were good friends, poor little Clarke could not help feeling a pang of jealousy whenever he found that his part did not seem to go so well as Jimmy's. On one of these occasions, when Rogers had had the lion's share of laughter, Clarke was heard to groan and mutter in an undertone throughout the evening. Some one who knew the cause remarked, 'Never mind, the audience may to-morrow night be entirely with you;

it often happens so, you know;' to which he replied, 'It isn't jealousy, there's room enough for both of us; but it does seem hard that when I have got a good thing to say, I find it received only tolerably well, when if Jimmy exclaims "How are you?" or "Good-bye for the present," the audience is convulsed. I can't understand it.' Poor little Clarke! He did not see that it was not the words, but the way Jimmy delivered them. Clarke was a great favourite; but his heavy voice and manner were altogether different from Jimmy's, whose voice was light and thin. Clarke had a slow and ponderous way of speaking, with a kind of gruff drawl, while his rival's delivery was rapid and comically jerky. They differed, too, in features: Clarke's face was long, with a large nose, while Rogers had a small, round face, with a decided *nez rétroussé*. Clarke had complained more than once that Rogers had always longer and better parts to act than he, so when the burlesque of *William Tell* was read to the company, it transpired that Clarke's part of Gesler was undoubtedly the better of the two. It was amusing to watch his face during the reading, and his delight at having much to say and do, and Rogers very little. Rogers was perfectly still, listened attentively, looking on the ground, and, when the reading was over, he said nothing, but went home.

One night, during the full-dress rehearsal of *William Tell*, we came to a scene in which Clarke and Jimmy had a duet. Clarke's voice was harsh, and

often got painfully flat, especially when he had to dwell on a particular note. Rogers, on the contrary, sang in tune, and true. Clarke insisted that the key was different.

Mr. Ferdinand Wallerstein, the conductor of the orchestra, an old and dear friend of mine, assured him to the contrary, and they tried it over so often that everybody grew weary of waiting; Mr. Wallerstein exclaimed that 'The key had not been changed (he ought to know), and he could not be kept there all night; that the voice was always at higher pitch at night,' etc. Clarke, whose ear was very defective, still declared the key was *not* the same; Rogers kept perfectly silent, singing the duet over and over again, without showing the smallest sign of impatience or irritation. At last Clarke shouted in great anger, 'It's a conspiracy! You've changed the key amongst you to oblige Mr. Rogers.' Upon which Rogers remarked in the most quiet, placid manner, 'It's all right—dear boy—same key—only —you're not so well to-night.' Of course Clarke was furious, while Jimmy remained provokingly quiet, without the sign of a smile upon his face.

The night for production arrived. Clarke was full of excitement, and said to me, 'This is a great opportunity for me, and Jimmy (who was playing the small part of Sarnem) will not in *this* piece have it all his own way.' When they met in the green-room Clarke was a little uneasy at the comic appearance of Jimmy, who was dressed in black from top to toe,

his wig and brows of the deadliest hue, but his face of an unearthly white. Clarke remarked, 'Oh, of course the audience will be in fits at his appearance, but *that* won't last all night.'

Everything began to Clarke's complete delight, for his part was going splendidly, and he never acted better. At last Jimmy's cue came to enter. He had a splendid reception, of course; Clarke was prepared for that; but after the applause which greeted Jimmy was over, there still was heard a titter all over the house, which continued through Clarke's speeches. He was at first under the impression that his own acting was the cause; but on turning round he saw that Jimmy had on a most extraordinary garment, which took the place of a shoulder-cape. It was only half a yard in width, of jet-black, and began at the back of his neck; but the length of it no one ever knew, for it was never quite on the stage, and never quite off. It was always in somebody's way, and we were constantly obliged to step over this never-ending, long, narrow, garter-like train, which seemed to be everywhere; and when one or the other of us *did* happen to stand on it unconsciously, he would remark, in his quiet, sad way, '*You're on it, you're on it.*' Anyone can imagine the effect this would have on an audience who knew the actor's ways so well. Whenever he had to go off, he left the end of this train behind him for some time, when all at once, in the middle of a scene and quite unexpectedly, the bit that was still in sight would sud-

denly disappear with a palpable jerk. By the time this had happened twice or thrice, the audience looked for its recurrence, and then laughed immoderately. Clarke was furious, and declared that it was all planned to annoy him. When they sang the duet over which they had such a discussion, the end of Jimmy's train was of course *off* the stage, and he had arranged that some heavy weight should be on the end of it which was out of sight, so that all through the duet it appeared as though some one was standing on the other end of it (a ripple of laughter going on amongst the audience all the while); Jimmy only now and then looked at the offending garment with a resigned and patient expression. When the duet was over the strain suddenly relaxed. The effect of this was that the whole house was convulsed with laughter. Clarke's indignation was indescribable. While the finale of the burlesque was sung by all the characters, Jimmy stood in the corner of the stage, with his long train arranged to reach the footlights. When the curtain fell, and all concerned were called before the curtain, Clarke insisted on going *before* Jimmy, and not *with* him. 'He wasn't going to have his applause at such a moment interfered with by Jimmy's tomfoolery; he might do what he liked with his absurd train, *after* he had gone off.' So on Clarke went. He was loudly cheered, and was smiling with supreme satisfaction as he crossed the stage, when, just as he was making his final bow, he tripped over the train which Jimmy had carefully left, as it appeared, before

the curtain fell, close to the footlights. This created a roar from the house, and was the last straw to Clarke. He was afterwards heard to say that 'There ought not to be two low comedians in one piece.' The public did not agree with him.

Then came the *Miller and his Men*, described by its joint authors, Talfourd and Byron, as a burlesque *mealy*-drama. Another boy's part for me! This time I was relegated to the stables, as I had to play a groom, Karl, or, in the words of the authors, 'An English tiger, from the wild jungles of Belgravia.' Grindoff, the miller, 'and the leader of a very brass band of most unpopular performers, with a thorough base accompaniment of at least fifty vices,' was played by Miss Saunders; the rival comedians —Clarke being Lothair, a virtuous peasant, and Rogers a forlorn old woman, Ravina—were still 'both in the same piece;' in which other Strand favourites, whom I have not yet mentioned, clever Maria Simpson, handsome Eleanor Bufton, and that delightful dancer and amiable woman, Rosina Wright, also appeared. The rivals, of course, had all sorts of little troubles during the run, and especially on the last night of it. Rogers slipped off the stage towards the end, and as Clarke was speaking his final lines, just before the general chorus, a ripple of laughter ran through the house. Clarke mistook this for a tribute to himself, and was beaming with smiles, when suddenly a loud thunder-clap, and then a slow, tremulous, and rumbling noise was heard,

followed by a roar of laughter; Clarke turned round, wondering what on earth was the matter, and saw Jimmy dressed as the ghost of Ravina, in a long white robe, a cap with an enormous frill, a pale, sad face, and carrying a lighted bedroom candle, rising through the clouds to the 'ghost melody' from the *Corsican Brothers*. I need not say that not another word of the play or a note of the finale was heard. When the curtain fell and Clarke had disappeared in positive anguish, Jimmy quietly remarked that he had arranged with the conductor of the orchestra and the carpenters a little surprise for the last night, feeling sure that it would greatly amuse the audience, and, above all, delight Clarke!

So far as I can tax a memory very imperfect as to dates, it was at this time that I had the good fortune to attract the notice of a once distinguished actress (as Miss Foote), but whom I, of course, only knew as the Dowager Countess of Harrington. She wrote to me to say that she had been several times to see me act, and that she felt obliged to tell me of the impression I had made upon her, asking 'to be allowed to call on me.' I was, of course, delighted.

My father had known her slightly when she was at her zenith, and would often speak of her as one of the loveliest and most amiable of women. He would often recall not only the charm she possessed as an accomplished actress, but her good-nature to everybody, high and low, in the theatre. It will be needless for me to say how I looked forward to

talking to her. She stayed a long time the first day she called, and I soon found that the account my father gave of her charm of manner had not been exaggerated.

My mother had never met Lady Harrington, but she soon grew much attached to one who became a true friend to me, and as time went on seemed more and more endeared to me. Lady Harrington would often speak of days gone by, and would assure me that she was *not* a great actress; adding, 'People were pleased to say I was charming, so I suppose I was.' She must have been very beautiful when young, being still extremely handsome as an old lady. She was as good, too, as she was handsome; and I can never forget her kindness to me. When I was once seriously ill with an attack of bronchitis, Lady Harrington was unwearying in her attention to me, and would, day after day, sit by my bedside reading to me, and would bring with her all the delicacies she could think of. When I had sufficiently recovered my strength, she sent me to the seaside to recruit my health. To record all the kindnesses she bestowed on me and mine would fill up many pages, but my gratitude is indelibly written on my heart. She gave me a portrait of herself, as Maria Darlington in *A Roland for an Oliver,* and by it one can see how lovely she must have been. Among her other gifts was a beautiful old-fashioned diamond and ruby ring, which she told me was given to her by the Earl (who was then Lord Petersham)

when he was engaged to be married to her. She always called me by my second name, 'Effie,' and all her letters to me, of which I have a large number, are so addressed. If well enough, she rarely failed to be present on the first night of a new piece in which I acted; and if by chance prevented, would send old Payne, her butler, who had been her faithful servant for ever so many years, into the pit, and in the morning he was expected to go to her ladyship with a full account of my performance, and to say what I wore, and how I looked. Payne, for the purpose, took paper and pencil with him to write down all the particulars, as she loved to hear every detail. Lady Harrington was much attached to Payne, and also to her maid, who, I believe, had been in her service since she was quite young, and often spoke of them as *Romeo* and *Juliet*. She constantly expressed a wish to see me established as a comedy actress, and begged me to try hard for that position. To tell the truth, I must have been a great trouble at times to my kindly manager, for the fact of having acted successfully in two or three little comediettas seemed more and more to whet my appetite. I recall many a happy visit to Richmond Terrace, and until her last illness I had no better friend than Lady Harrington.

When Miss Swanborough on her marriage with Major Lyon retired from the stage and her management of the Strand Theatre, everyone engaged there, high and low, regretted her loss. She was

always considerate and kind, and I can remember the graceful speech she made when we presented her with a handsome testimonial as a farewell token of our affection. Her forte in acting was comedy, and she was very charming in the *Loves of Arcadia*, a pretty pastoral from the pen of that distinguished authoress and good friend Miss Braddon, who, it may be already forgotten, commenced her career as an actress: certainly she has never lost her great love for the stage. Miss Swanborough was handsome, tall, and graceful, and always dressed in perfect taste. I have had the pleasure of meeting her now and then since she was '*My Mother*,' as she jokingly said the last time I saw her. When our own management was drawing to a close, I received a letter from her which I shall always treasure; and I am glad to have this opportunity of publicly thanking her for many acts of kindness to me during the time I had the privilege of being in her service.

After Miss Swanborough's retirement, the theatre remained under the management of other members of her family.

The next burlesque I have to speak about was *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Scamp*, the personation of this promising young gentleman—who was both a 'lively youth' and a 'sad boy'—falling to me. All the Strand favourites were engaged in it, with the addition of a charming recruit to the company—the graceful and fascinating Fanny Josephs. Like all Byron's clever burlesques, at this time *Aladdin* en-

joyed great success. It was strongly cast and admirably played. Many of the old Strand audiences will recall Jimmy Rogers as the Widow Twankay, Aladdin's mother, who, to quote the Arabian Nights, 'Even in her youth had not possessed any beauty.'

There was no attempt to exaggerate in either dress or acting. When he entered with a woe-begone face and looked at the audience, nothing else was seen or heard for some seconds. But, however Jimmy might provoke his audience to laughter, he would not be tempted to laugh himself. I only saw this happen to him upon the stage once, and that was caused by a circumstance at which the most rigid must have given way.

This is the story. Very often during the run of *Aladdin*—and sometimes night after night—there sat in the middle of the pit a stout, bald-headed man, who appeared to be not only a faithful friend to the theatre, but a warm admirer of little Clarke, to whom he was a great comfort, for whenever Jimmy got more applause than Clarke thought was his share, his sheet-anchor was the bald-headed friend in the pit, who, when Clarke said or did anything to provoke applause, would laugh louder than anyone else, and, when the applause had quite subsided and everything was still, would shout at the top of his voice, 'Bravo, Clarke!'

This happened so often that people began to tease Clarke about it, and even the audience would sometimes turn into ridicule this incessant cry of 'Bravo,

Clarke!' Clarke dearly loved praise, but when he found his bald-headed admirer a little injudicious in his approval, he became uneasy. One night the owner of the hairless head, who had been waiting at the stage-door to see Clarke leave the theatre, stepped up to him and requested to be allowed to 'have the honour of shaking hands with one for whom he had such sincere admiration.' Clarke recognised his friend the moment he raised his hat, for he saw the familiar bald head shining under a gas-light, and shook hands with his admirer, who modestly said, 'I'm sure you will remember me, sir, when I tell you that I am the person who so often sits in the middle of the pit, and I am so anxious that you should know how sincere is my admiration, that I call out, whenever I see an opportunity, "Bravo, Clarke."' This was a moment not to be lost. 'I appreciate more than I can say,' said Clarke, 'your kind attention; and it is, I assure you, a welcome sound to me to hear your friendly voice. But, unfortunately, there are people who are ever ready to ridicule over-favouritism. Do you think you could throw in "Bravo, Clarke" less frequently, and not in so marked a manner? Let it on no account cease altogether, only give it with more judgment.' The man replied, 'Certainly, sir; of course I will,' and they parted. The next night the house was full as usual, and the bald head was again the centre-piece of beauty in the pit. All through the first scene the well-known voice was silent; one could see an

anxious look gradually becoming more and more fixed upon Clarke's face. He glared again and again in the direction of the pit, but no 'Bravo, Clarke' greeted his anxious ears. At last, when Rogers, Clarke, and myself sang the trio which ended the scene, the familiar voice shouted repeatedly, to Clarke's horror, 'Bravo, Rogers!' Clarke's face caught Jimmy's eye, who laughed to such a degree that the tears rolled down his cheeks. Poor Clarke never forgot it; the more disgusted he looked, the more Rogers laughed. All this so amused us that it was with difficulty we managed to get through our parts; for throughout the evening this man, at unexpected moments, would cry out, 'Bravo, Rogers!' giving, of course, fresh impetus to our laughter. This was the only time I ever saw Rogers laugh in the business of the scene, and then it was an impossibility for anyone who understood the circumstances, and was not made of stone, to help it.

Then came *Esmeralda*, in which I played Pierre Gringoire; Rogers, who was always of delicate health, and now often very ill, played Claude Frollo; and Clarke, with a wonderful make-up, was Quasimodo. Occasionally, and sometimes on 'benefit' nights, I now, to my delight, got other parts, notably Lucy Morton, originally played by Madame Vestris in Planché's charming little comedy *Court Favour*, a performance of which the *Athenæum* spoke in these terms: 'The *petite* figure of Miss Wilton is well suited to the half-infant character, and there is a

subtlety in her style which gives piquancy to the dialogue between Lucy and the Duke of Albemarle, whom she so cunningly over-reaches.'

The next burlesque I acted in was, I think, Byron's parody on the *Colleen Bawn*, called *Miss Eily O'Connor*. I was cast for another boy—Myles-na-Coppaleen, in which I introduced a strong Irish brogue. Rogers was Miss Eily, and Clarke Danny Mann; two admirable performances, although poor Jimmy now suffered so much at times that it was painful to see him waiting for his cue to go on the stage, but, somehow, the hearty welcome which always greeted him would be such a stimulant that, after awhile, he would act as if nothing were amiss. How little does an audience know what actors fight against in the exercise of duty—how much pain they have been known to suffer bodily and mentally in order to go through their work! A true artist will never break faith with the public while still able to stand or speak. His sense of duty is paramount, and he must indeed be *in extremis* before he will desert his post. I am speaking of *artists* in the true sense, not of those who out of conceit adopt the theatrical profession as a pastime, and into whose consideration art seldom enters. One of the latter category succeeded in obtaining an engagement at the Strand Theatre while I was there, to play small parts. She had a pretty face, and, in her opinion, nothing more seemed necessary. One night this young recruit did not come near the theatre

at all, and a substitute was hurriedly sent on for her part, which, fortunately, was limited to a few lines. The next evening the lady arrived at the usual time, making neither apology nor excuse, and offering no explanation of her absence. The stage-manager angrily inquired, 'How is it you were not here last night?' 'I could not come,' she replied, staring with astonishment at his question. 'Why?' he asked. '*It rained*,' she answered. She was politely informed that, as our English weather was somewhat uncertain, and a foreign climate might perhaps suit her better, her services would be required no longer. She left the theatre saying, 'It was a cruel profession to be expected to leave one's home on a night not fit to turn a dog out!'

Jimmy was often helped from his cab to his dressing-room, looking so ill and weak that I have wondered his doctor did not insist upon his not coming (which, I believe, was frequently the case); but he was obstinate, and would not disappoint the public. There is something in the atmosphere of a theatre which picks one up, so to speak, and which seems to give one, for the time, almost superhuman strength. I have myself been taken from a sick-bed wrapped in blankets, accompanied by my doctor (protesting all the time), who was afterwards stationed at the side-entrance to the stage with drugs and restoratives to keep me up. I have known the most acute pains to disappear for the time, and the mere fact of one's thoughts running through another

channel for some hours has frequently helped a speedy recovery. I have seen Jimmy rally to such a degree that it has made us wonder, and through it all he would be so quaintly funny, so sadly comic, that we could not resist smiling, forgetting for the moment how ill he was. There was a complete unconsciousness of his own power to make one laugh, which was more droll than I can describe. It was irresistible, a sad face with a curious undercurrent of humour—an odd, quiet look of surprise when the audience roared at him, and the more sadly surprised he appeared the more they laughed. He was the strangest mixture of combined fun and suffering I can remember. Jimmy was really a fair and generous actor, but could not resist the temptation to tease Clarke sometimes, who was, however, a great favourite, and held his own with the public for many years. He was very clever, and much liked by all of us as a kindly little man. In spite of his jealousies, and always looking on Jimmy as a formidable rival, he would feel deeply for him in his sufferings, and would have done anything in his power to help him. This Jimmy knew full well, and they were really fond of each other. When the play was over (as often happens with barristers after a 'keen encounter of their tongues') they might frequently have been seen walking from the theatre together arm in arm.

When the *Miller and his Men* was revived, I was, of course, given my original part of Karl; but I de-

cided to take a bold step, and declined to play it. According to the rules and regulations of the theatre, 'by refusing to act a part which was in accordance with my agreement' (and especially one which I had played originally), I forfeited my engagement. I determined to do this, at all risks, in the hope of obtaining somewhere the position I coveted. But alas! I soon found that I had made a mistake, for there was not that eagerness on the part of the managers to secure my services I thought there would be, and the difficulty to get out of the beaten track was greater than I anticipated. I applied everywhere, and nowhere could I get an engagement for comedy. Matters were becoming serious, when an offer came from Mr. Frank Matthews, who was then manager of the St. James's Theatre; but it was for another burlesque boy in the *Heart of Midlothian.* It may be of some interest to state, in contrast to what actors are paid nowadays (a change for which our own management is chiefly responsible), that the largest salary I had hitherto received in London was nine pounds a week, and that Mr. Matthews then offered me ten guineas; but as the engagement was only to be for three months, I was advised to ask fifteen pounds. After a long correspondence, Mr. Matthews consented, on the condition that in my written agreement ten guineas was entered as my salary, and that every Saturday night he would, when he said 'Good evening,' slip the balance into my hand. He wished me to agree to this arrangement, as mine, he said,

would be a larger salary than that of another lady in the theatre, who held a leading position; and, if it came to her knowledge, might cause jealousy, as he did not care to trust to the discretion of his treasurer. This novel arrangement was settled to our mutual satisfaction, although it was often remarked that Mr. Matthews was always pointedly cordial in his greeting on Saturdays, as he, on those nights *only*, shook hands with me.

Poor Jimmy Rogers had also seceded from the Strand Theatre—it was evident that his health was becoming worse and worse. But, to the astonishment of all who knew him, he engaged himself to act in the *Heart of Midlothian*. I was delighted at the fact of meeting him again, but found him sadly changed, and looking like a faded photograph. I was shocked and pained when I held his poor, thin hand in mine, and gazed at his wan face and sunken eyes. I could see that the cruel relentless malady, consumption, had slowly yet surely crept its way. My heart was too full of tears for me to utter a word of welcome, and when he looked at me with his sad smile, he could see that I dared not trust myself to speak. I forget how long he acted his part of Effie Deans, but seeing him grow weaker and weaker every night made my duties very painful. It was such a ghastly mockery to act in burlesque with a man who was dying before my eyes! At last, one night I noticed him coming down slowly from his dressing-room, supporting himself by the

banisters, and halting on every second or third step. I met him at the foot of the stairs, when he placed his hand upon my shoulder and seemed to breathe with great difficulty. I helped him towards the stage, and begged him to sit down; a chair was brought to him, but he declined, saying in broken sentences, 'I dare not—I shall never—get up again.' He then whispered to me, 'Marie dear, help me through it to-night—do what you can for me—I am not well—dear—not at all well.'

Not well! No, poor fellow, the end was not far off. He had scarcely breath to speak. I said to him, 'Oh, Jimmy, why did you come here to-night?' 'My fault, dear,' he replied; 'I would come. I shall be all right to-morrow.' His words had such an ominous sound. He could only walk through the piece, leaning upon my shoulder when we were on the stage together. As I found his breath failing him, I either spoke his words or continued with my own. Towards the end of the piece his hands became cold, and his face so changed that my heart was sick with fear. The audience little knew that they were laughing at a dying man. How I managed to get through it all I don't know, but necessity makes us strong. I thought the end of the play would never come. He would allow no one but me to help or advise him; indeed, at moments he became fractious, and my task was truly painful. Just as the curtain fell he muttered, 'Thank you, my dear; God bless you and help me.' He sank into a

chair, and as I knelt by his side he looked strangely at me, and whispered, 'I am dying.' He was taken home, where his poor little wife, to whom he was devoted, had been anxiously waiting for his return. He would not, I heard, allow her to think that he was so ill as he felt, and insisted on going through his work to the last, in defiance of all advice. The end soon came, and his last words were, 'The farce is over—drop the curtain.' *Poor Jimmy!* You will ever be remembered by those who knew you best as a kind and generous friend. No one in trouble or in need ever sought your help in vain. 'Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?'

When James Rogers died, no one regretted his death more than his old friend and rival, John Clarke.

My engagement at the St. James's was soon over, when I was sent for by Mr. Webster to act for three or four weeks at the Adelphi in the *Little Treasure*, in which Mr. Sothern at first played Captain Walter Maydenblush, the part being afterwards taken by my friend Mr. Billington—'Handsome Jack,' as he used to be called. I hoped this might be a stepping-stone to the goal I was trying for, but my Lady Fortune seemed to have turned her back upon me for a time, and instead of offers pouring in, no notice was taken of me, and I saw no anxiety to secure my services.

This performance reminds me that when I had

lost the title of Cupid, the epithet 'Little' for a long time took its place; for I was in turn 'The *Little* Treasure,' 'The *Little* Savage,' 'The *Little* Sentinel,' 'The *Little* Devil,' and '*Little* Don Giovanni.'

There was an old member of the new Adelphi company who, when I mention his name, will be remembered by many who knew him as an eccentric and amusing character of days gone by—Robert, but always known as 'Bob,' Romer. He was not an important actor, but such an oddity that without him the company would not have seemed complete, for everybody had an affection for him. Bob was ambitious, but never reached the summit (or anywhere near it) of his ambition. He was rarely, I believe, entrusted with more than a few lines, and constantly, when a new play was about to be produced, some friend would delight in asking him what his part would be in it. His reply would be always the same: 'A—what have I got to do? Oh—a—nothing—at all—in the first and second acts—and —a—next to nothing—in the last.' He spoke in quaint, rapid jerks, and, after a slight pause, his words would seem to try to get one before the other. I remember meeting him one morning when he had just left the theatre, after rehearsing in a new piece. As I saw his portly figure coming along, I could not resist asking the well-worn question, 'What have you got to do in the new play, Mr. Romer?' 'A—a—what—have I—got to do? Oh

—a—same old thing—nothing—a—nothing at all.' 'Nothing at all?' I replied. 'A—a—well—a—the old story—a few—idiotic lines, and "exit." In the last—piece but one, I—a—was—a magistrate—nothing to do but—wear a wig—and—a—take it off again. In the next—I was—a—a—rustic—nothing to do—but—to drink the health of the Squire—in an emptyjug—shout out "Hurray"—laugh "Ha! ha!"—and go off—with a noisy crowd. A—in this piece—I play—an Alligator.' 'A what, Mr. Romer?' 'An Alligator—curious—line of business. I'm discovered—a—at the beginning of this piece in a tank. All I have to say is "*Tan—ter—ran—tan—tan!*" I don't appear again till the last scene, when I say "*Whack—fal—la!*" It won't—tax the brain much!' Poor 'Bob' was the subject of much amusement to his comrades. He had one particular horror, that of coming up through trap-doors. He vowed that he would leave the theatre if ever he was asked to appear through a trap. As Mr. Toole was in the company, I need not say that he took special delight in constantly measuring Bob for an imaginary trap in the coming play—a proceeding which he never got accustomed to, and always became excited over. Bob, when asked by a friend what his line of business in the theatre was, answered, 'Oh—a—*etceteras.*' It was a fact that whenever a play was read by the author to the company, after giving out the list of characters and finishing with 'etc., etc.,' Bob would be heard muttering *sotto voce*, 'Ah—that's—me.'

One more story of this quaint old gentleman will not, I hope, bore the reader. I remember an amusing scene occurring one morning as I arrived at the stage-door to attend a rehearsal, when I heard Bob questioning the hall-porter with a mysterious and puzzled expression in his face. First of all I must explain that on the previous day a little dinner had been given to him by a few friends in the company who desired to have a good joke at poor Bob's expense, and to have one or two speeches about his untried talents, and to sympathize with his failure in ever getting a good part. The poor fellow rose to reply, and, after a lengthy speech, which I believe caused much suppressed but undetected laughter, he ended by saying, 'A—I feel much touched by—your—a—sympathy; and with regard to my—a—hidden ability—a—light under a bushel—I may say—if I am not important, I am at least—a—pleasing.'

This miniature banquet was kept up until ten o'clock, for Bob had not to appear on the stage before eleven, just to act one of his celebrated 'next to nothing' parts. He had partaken rather freely of the wine, and was somewhat unsteady. When he awoke on the following morning, he had a vague recollection of the dinner, but, for the life of him, could not remember anything that happened afterwards, and his anxiety to find out how things went off at the theatre was very great. When I arrived at the stage-door, a conversation to this effect was going on between Bob and the hall-porter:

BOB: 'A—good house—last night, Richardson?'

PORTER: 'Yes, sir; *very* good house.'

BOB: 'A—nothing—went wrong at all?'

PORTER: 'Nothing, sir.'

BOB: 'A—how did the farce go?'

PORTER: 'Not so well as usual, I was told, sir.'

BOB (*quickly*): 'Not so well? How's that?'

PORTER: 'I did hear, sir, that it were 'issed.'

BOB: 'Bless my soul! Was Mr.—a—Webster in the theatre?'

PORTER: 'He had gone 'ome, sir.'

BOB (*breathing more easily*): 'Is he here this morning?'

PORTER: 'Yes, sir, just arrived.'

BOB: 'A—did he—ask for me?'

PORTER: 'No, sir.'

BOB (*after cautiously looking round*): 'About last night?—a—*was I here?*'

Mrs. Swanborough offered me a re-engagement to play the hero in a forthcoming burlesque by Byron called *Orpheus and Eurydice*. I was a beggar and could not choose, so I agreed, and returned to my former home. I wish it to be understood that my relations with the Strand management were then, and always had been, of a cordial nature. I met with constant kindness from all the Swanborough family, of which Ada had now grown to be a prominent member, and we were the best of friends. It was only my impatient desire to improve my position that parted us.

There were many changes in the company. George Honey was now the principal comedian, supported by Arthur Wood, an admirable actor, who also graduated under old Mr. Chute, at the Bristol Theatre, and David James, who then made his first appearance at the Strand Theatre, where afterwards he became so prominent. Pretty Fanny Hughes—alas! she only died the other day—had also become a favourite, and I remember singing a clever duet with her to the combined tunes of the 'Whistling Thief' and the 'Harp in the Air.' I was delighted with an opportunity I soon afterwards had of acting in a charming little comedietta called *Unlimited Confidence*, written by A. C. Troughton, which was a great success, only, through being placed first in the programme, often the audience would not be all in to see it. A message came one day that the Prince of Wales would visit the theatre that evening, and that his Royal Highness desired my piece to be placed second, as he wished to see it. How delighted I was! The compliment, of course, made me feel very proud. I also acted in one more burlesque called *Mazourka*.

I must not omit a brief reference to the Shakespearean Tercentenary. When that great event was celebrated the theatres united in honouring the poet's memory, either complete plays, or selections from them, being acted throughout the country.

The Strand contribution consisted of scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the balcony

scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which I appeared as Juliet, and Miss Ada Swanborough as Romeo. The balcony scene created quite a sensation, and was so successful that it was repeated for eight nights. I received such praise, and so many complimentary letters from good judges, that it will be understood how still more anxious I became to slip out of burlesque as quickly as possible. Some thought me wise, others mad; and, while they were deciding between the two, I determined to follow my own instincts and the urgent appeal to Mrs. Dombey, 'to make an effort.' Some time afterwards I heard that among those warmest in their praise of my acting as Juliet was Mr. W. S. Gilbert.

In the summer Mrs. Swanborough took her company down to the Theatre Royal, Liverpool, where, as will be mentioned further on, I first met Mr. Bancroft. We were playing in the burlesque of *Orpheus*, I remember, when some races were going on, and the winner of the Cup was called 'Black Deer;' in the evening Mr. George Honey, who was playing black 'King Pluto,' introduced an unexpected joke in my scene with him. 'Saucy boy! You've been to the races, it is clear.' I was taken by surprise; but soon recovered, and replied, 'Yes, and was a winner, too, you *Black Dear*.' The audience at once recognised the introduction, and received it with much laughter and applause. Mr. Honey, seeing that I had the best of it, added, 'Oh, so I thought; well, long may you *reign, dear*.' This,

being done on the spur of the moment, was more successful than if it had been pre-arranged.

I will end these reminiscences of early days with a story of my childhood, of which I was reminded during this visit to Liverpool.

One day I received a letter, which vividly recalled to my recollection (shall I ever forget it?) a remarkable journey I undertook years before, when I was but a mere child. The story, I fancy, will go far to prove that courage and determination were, even at that early age, strong points in my nature, although, in this instance, my youthful impetuosity might have led to serious complications. My father, with myself and three sisters, were in Scotland, while my mother, with two other tiny sisters, were in Lancashire, fulfilling an engagement. News came that she was seriously ill. I knew that her great anxiety would be about her children, and how she would wish them to be near her. What was to be done? My father had gone away some distance with the company he was attached to, to act somewhere, leaving us children in charge of the landlady. I made up my little mind to take two of my sisters (one was mentally afflicted, and I dared not risk it) to my mother. But how, and by what means? I went to the pier, and found out that a boat was going to Glasgow that night. I learnt, also, that on the day of our arrival a steamer would leave Glasgow for Liverpool. I inquired all about the cost of the journey, and decided without any hesitation, knowing the chronic state of

our finances, upon the cheapest part of the vessel. I turned it all over in my limited brain, which did not admit of room to consider risks, difficulties, and consequences; I only knew that our mother was ill, and if she should die without seeing us it would be a reproach to us all. I am ashamed to say that my father's anxiety and displeasure at the discovery of our departure on his return home never entered my already overcrowded mind. There was a small sum of money in the house, realized by an entertainment which he and I had given. This I took, and secured the tickets for myself and two sisters, who were too young to understand the meaning of my wild scheme. The boat was to start that night, and my next anxiety was how to leave the house without the knowledge of our landlady. (I can hear my readers say, 'Was there ever so mad a proceeding?' and I agree with them.) My father frequently alluded to it, and with a grave shake of the head implied that he had not forgiven the terrible scare my proceeding cost him.

But to return. I packed all the things I thought necessary in a carpet-bag (our wardrobe was limited, so it did not take long), dressed myself and sisters, and waited till the family prayers had begun in the room below. When I heard the murmur of voices, we went downstairs as noiselessly as possible, carefully dropping the carpet-bag with a heavy thud, as is so often the case when one is doubly cautious. The noise luckily was not heard, owing to the wind that

was howling outside, and away we went to the boat, which was rocking about in troubled waters, and the sight of which would now turn my steps in an opposite direction; but youth knows no fear. We went on board. What a night it was! We were all very frightened, and one of my young sisters entreated to be allowed 'to get out and walk'! My task to cheer them, and bear the consequences of a rough passage must be understood, for I cannot describe it. On our arrival at Glasgow, I made the terrible discovery that my pocket had been picked, and every penny of my poor possessions gone. I was completely heart-broken, and did not know which way to turn, for I had nothing left to pay for our journey to Liverpool.

In the greatest despair I inquired my way to the ship we were to go by, and then asked to see the captain, or some one who would help us to get to our journey's end. When I told my little story, the captain laughed, and said how naughty I had been, and that he thought it was his duty to send me back to my father; but when I cried, and explained how ill my mother was, he seemed touched, and said, 'Well, you are, at this stage of your journey, almost as near your mother as to your father, so I'll take you to her. But I daren't bring you along as passengers; if you don't mind coming aboard with those who go free, you know, to Liverpool (why didn't he say paupers? but I suppose he hesitated to wound my feelings), why it can be done, and I'll get a pass for you. What is your name?' I did not answer at once, and

he evidently understood, for he immediately said, 'I'll put it down as Briton, for few little girls could be so brave as you are; so you deserve the name of Briton, and I'll give it you.' He patted me on the head, and knowing that my money had been stolen, and I could get no dinner, he gave us sandwiches. When night came we three little waifs were placed on shore amongst the paupers, and when the name 'Briton' was called, I went on board with a little sister by each hand. The captain, as we passed, patted me on the head. I looked up at him, and, I am not sure, but if it had been daylight, I think I should have seen tears in his eyes. It was a rough night again, and as I sat down in the cabin, which was full of tobacco-smoke, I felt that if we remained there we should be very ill; so I planted myself with the two children on the steps, where we could get air. By-and-by, the language amongst 'the free passengers' became so dreadful that I covered the children's heads with their coats to prevent their hearing, and they went to sleep. I felt very unhappy, and began to cry as I realized what a rash thing I had done. Presently one of the ship's officers, quite young-looking, came along, and, seeing me cry, stopped and spoke to me. He soon discovered that we were different from our surroundings, and took us to his own cabin, where he left us, only now and again peeping in during the night to see if we were all right. In the morning he brought us some breakfast, and, when we arrived at Liverpool, the captain

instructed him to take us to an address which I gave him of a great friend of my father's family, Mr. Warne, a lime merchant, who told the young seaman my name, and who we were. He then took charge of us, and sent us on comfortably enough to my mother, who was at Wigan. The unexpected sight of her children frightened my mother, but it certainly had the effect of causing a revulsion, because she was much better the next day. My father was immediately communicated with, and the whole proceedings related to him. He also learnt that the confusion in the house when it was discovered that we had gone was indescribable. The next day the bellman, or crier, was shouting everywhere, 'Oh yes! Oh yes! Lost, stolen, or strayed,' etc. My father, hastily summoned home, was almost deprived of reason by a fruitless search. He threatened to punish the landlady for her neglect, and the whole affair caused a terrible commotion. When my father received news of our safety, the reaction made him very ill for some days. So I had much to answer for. Now for the sequel to this story.

The writer of the note I received in Liverpool was the very man who had rescued us from the society of our 'free passengers,' and had watched us with such tender care on that memorable night. My heart was full of that rare commodity which I often read of in books, gratitude; and when, by my wish, he came to see me, I welcomed his kindly face with sincerity. Later on, having made a position for

himself, and being on the point of going to settle in one of our colonies, he asked me to become his wife. I wished I could have said yes, for a man with such a heart must have made a good husband; my feelings, however, were only those of gratitude, not love, and I was obliged to tell him so. I was going to say 'poor fellow,' but I am sure he is, if still living, happy and prosperous, as he deserves to be.

I frequently reflect how largely life is made up of accidents. Had I accepted the offer of my young sailor friend, how, I wonder, would my doing so have affected both my own and my husband's fate.

My Narrative ..

—

Spencroft.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY MEMORIES.

THE surmise which ends the preceding chapter can never be solved, for I have to thank my good fortune that when, later on, I ventured to repeat to Marie Wilton the question asked in vain by the young sailor, I met with an assent. I must now beg forgiveness for interrupting this narrative, to tell of things that happened before those days arrived; and with a warning that this and the following chapter will chiefly concern myself, and my early experiences as a country actor, I ask for the reader's lenient thoughts during their recital, before proceeding to matters of more consequence: for, from the time we met and, afterwards, linked our lives and fortunes, we will tell our tale together, helping each other's work throughout it, although now and then one or the other of us will relate certain parts of it alone, through more intimate and detailed knowledge of its varied incidents.

I shall owe much to the gift of a retentive memory, which is perhaps remarkable in regard to dates and

things theatrical; for it would be no trouble to me to answer straight off, wagering on the exactitude of my every answer, and arming my questioner with a twenty years' file of the *Times*, where I was, and, if acting, what part I was playing, in any month, of any year, between the summers of 1865 and 1885. Or, if I was away from home for a holiday, I could as easily give an itinerary of my travels.

Since relief from the many labours of management gave me leisure, I have often thought that I could remember something of events which might be worth recording, and, I confess, have been vain enough to hope that my reflections upon them would be, if I tried to express them, read at least by lovers of the stage and the players. In what I write I will follow the words of the brightest mind that has illumined England, by means of those wondrous works which have for ever dignified the calling I have followed:

> 'Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice.'

If I disobey the injunction, it shall be rather in the first than in the second behest. Merely adding that I will try not to give way to egotism, for my self-esteem may be fairly expressed in the words of Captain Hawtree, 'I don't pretend to be a particularly good sort of fellow, nor a particularly bad sort of fellow.'

There is but little, it seems to me, that I could tell of my childhood or of my boyhood to interest the

ordinary reader; nearly all to whom such matters might once have had even a small value have either passed away or have been neither seen nor known by me since those now far-off days.

I was born in Surrey, but very near to London, on Friday, May 14th, 1841, in the same year as the Prince of Wales; and the weeks of my age I can count every Wednesday by the number recorded on the title-page of *Punch*, which publication almost immediately followed me into the world, where it will long survive me.

I was christened Squire Bancroft after my grandfather, who had once been tutor to the then heir to the dukedom of Devonshire, and was a great Latin scholar, airing his learning at the font, for although he allowed his eldest son—who, after serving his King as a middy in the Royal Navy in the days of Nelson, was ordained as a clergyman, and, indeed, many years later, officiated at my marriage—to escape with the simple name of John, he called my father Secundus, and his next son Gulielmus Tertius. I only thus briefly mention my grandfather because I owed my name to him, but I shall not trouble the reader with any further account of my ancestors.

I was brought up in some luxury, and surrounded by all the gentle influences one could wish. I have remembrances now of my father on his horse, wearing a blue coat with gilt buttons, and a bird's-eye cravat, looking, indeed, very like one of the coloured drawings so well known to all Londoners a few years

ago who ever looked into the windows of 'Billy' Sams's Library, at the corner of St. James's Street and Pall Mall, where the big red house now stands instead.

I can recall early morning visits to the greenhouses, my little hand held lovingly in my father's, and many a romp round a big mulberry-tree; but such pleasant days of childhood, chastened by one dreadful recollection of a big clock in the hall, past which I always hurried in the fear that some one was hidden inside its roomy case, were not my fate for long. My father was stricken with a painful malady which soon ended in his death, and with him, or rather with his illness, died nearly all his income.

At the age of barely more than thirty my poor mother, who was much younger than her husband, was left with her young children in a very altered position. The dreams of public school and college education for her sons were never to be realized; but how nobly she did all that her crippled means would reach is a memory hallowed by me, and one which I care not to dwell on here.

Briefly I will add that I was educated at private schools in England and in France. At one of the former, among my school-mates, although my memory almost fails to more than just recall him, was my afterwards friend and comrade, poor Harry Montague. When I think of my foreign home, it is still with a shudder at the recollection of an old woman who daily entered the dormitory at six a.m.,

and shrieked 'Levez-vous, messieurs!' as she threw the windows wide open, whatever the weather, and filled our basins with water from a well.

I can remember, during my holidays, going to the Exhibition of 1851, and being sent for home to see the funeral of the great Duke of Wellington; part of the wreck of my father's now rapidly dwindling property being a house in Fleet Street, near Temple Bar, which on that solemn day was draped in black and bore big urns of burning incense. The house I speak of was long since pulled down to give place to a palatial Insurance Office, but my mother's tenant then offered her seats to see a procession which stirred the English people in a way that comes but seldom. While abroad I recollect the birth of the Prince Imperial, and, returning to England soon afterwards, I saw the general illuminations in celebration of peace after the Crimean War. This I mention because, strange to say, I remember well being blocked for some very long time just in front of the house I occupied years afterwards in Cavendish Square.

When Edmund Yates published his delightful book of 'Recollections' I was among its earliest readers. In one of the commencing chapters I was greatly struck to find, in spite of a ten years' gap between our ages, how many of the things which marked, as it were, the author's youth, and now have passed away, I could myself remember.

I make no effort, like that practised writer, to treat

these matters with a charm of style such as pervades his book, but briefly try to call to mind what I really know I have seen. The 'twopenny' and 'general' postmen, with their royal-blue or scarlet coats, looking, indeed, very like the guards of the stage-coaches, I quite remember, as I do the policemen in their blue tail-coats, their hats with shiny tops and sides, their duck trousers, and white gloves. The foot-guards, clad in swallow-tails, with epaulettes and cross-belts, white trousers, and enormous bearskins (how often have their little effigies been bought for me in the Lowther Arcade!), I picture readily in Hyde Park, where then, at all the keepers' lodges, Cockney boys and girls invested pennies in curds-and-whey or hard-bake. The Quakers in their quaint clothing I also recollect. I remember, too, the boys who swarmed the chimneys and wore brass badges on their caps;—the sweep's street-cry, the dustman's bell, the old-clothes man's husky call (repeated every moment as he tramped along under the burden of his bag and pyramid of hats), the song of the buy-a-broom girls ('a large one for the lady and a small one for the baby')—all are treasured by me as part of the music of my childhood. I can just recall the statue of the Iron Duke at Hyde Park Corner when it first was placed there, and being shown the Thames Tunnel soon after its completion. I remember, too, going to Greenwich by the Rope Railway, the Colonnade in Regent Street, the pens in Old Smithfield Market, the piling and strapping of luggage on the roofs of

the railway carriages when travelling by train; these recollections also embrace the Chartist Riots of 1848, while the names of Rush and Manning told me first what murder meant.

Before I end this reference to early memories, I would like to tell how first I knew myself to be short-sighted. One day at home, when I was a small boy, my sisters were at work with their governess; the lady wore spectacles, which she had taken off and placed upon the table—always a magnetic act to mischievous young boys. How often had I adorned my nose with the spectacles of my grandfather and other old people! At once I clutched at these and put them on—I almost screamed, and I really cried out loud; for the governess was short-sighted, and I, for the first time in my life, could see! Instead of clambering upon chairs and other furniture to find out what the pictures had to tell, they were all made clear to me, as if by magic. Remarks which had so often puzzled me about minute and distant things became, with a sort of instinct, plain to my understanding. And from that time I have worn an eyeglass.

There would be little to interest in the picture I could paint of a decaying home, so in a few brief sentences, so far as private matters go, I will pass over these succeeding years.

I had to be taken away from school when still quite young, for the purse was emptying fast; then came some early struggles to cast about in what way

to earn a living. I had been always 'stage-struck' —my toys were little theatres, in which the *Red Rover* and the *Miller and his Men* enjoyed very long runs; while, later on, I would for years read a tragedy in preference to a novel, until I learnt from my mother an adoration for the works of Dickens. All my pocket-money was spent at the play, and dramatic books (of which I was a great collector) became my hobby; but the thought of my ever being in truth an actor was looked upon with ridicule.

During my youth I went greatly to the play, and remember much that I saw. The first glimmer of recollection I retain of amusements is the circus at Astley's, and of pantomimes both there and at the Surrey Theatre. I recall, but only with a child's remembrance, being taken to the Lyceum to see the incomparable Madame Vestris, and living in the fairy-land of William Beverly's gorgeous scenery; also to the Strand Theatre (then called Punch's Playhouse) to see that great actor, Farren, before he left the stage. The play was the *Vicar of Wakefield;* Mrs. Stirling was Olivia, and Leigh Murray also acted in it. Macready I never saw; but I do not forget as a very small boy reading and devouring, with a longing to be present, the bill of his farewell performance. At the same age I can just remember seeing Old Madame Tussaud seated at the inner-door of the famous Waxwork Exhibition in Baker Street, and comparing the reality with the effigy. Later, for my

mind retains much more, I was often at Sadler's Wells Theatre, and saw many of the Phelps' productions, several of them over and over again, and I witnessed most of Charles Kean's splendid revivals at the Princess's. At the Adelphi I saw Benjamin Webster, Leigh Murray, Paul Bedford, Miss Woolgar, and Madame Celeste, but—I can't say how it happened—never Wright.

My memory grows brighter at thoughts of the Olympic, where I was enthralled by an actor whom I never shall forget—Frederick Robson. I saw him very often, and vividly recall his pathos in the *Porter's Knot*, the intensity of his avarice as the old miser, Daddy Hardacre, and his wonderful acting in *Payable on Demand;* to have once seen is never to forget him as the distracted financier whose fortunes are saved by the news of Waterloo, brought to him by a carrier pigeon, which he ran round the stage embracing and covering with kisses in a way that provoked no smiles but only loud applause. The power of Robson's acting was as contagious as a fever.

At the Lyceum I recall Charles Dillon's fine performance in *Belphegor*. I sat that evening by my mother's side, and in the touching scene between the Mountebank and his son, we little thought that the pretty girl who made us cry by her pathetic acting as the boy Henri, in which she first appeared in London, would be my future wife. At the beginning of the new year I saw her for the second time as 'The little

fairy at the bottom of the sea,' in *Conrad and Medora.* Soon after at this theatre I also recollect seeing Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) act Lady Macbeth, and Pauline in the *Lady of Lyons.* These were the days when young theatre-goers had little ambition beyond a front seat in the pit: the days when one's toes were trodden on between the acts by horrible women who sold 'apples, oranges, and ginger-beer': the days when the bill of the play was little better than a greasy mass of printer's ink on paper nearly two feet long.

Soon afterwards I went for a short visit to New York, partly with a dream of seeking a fortune there which I did not find. I sailed from England in September, 1858, and was thirteen days at sea—at that time an average passage, when the *Persia* was the 'greyhound of the Atlantic,' and the Cunard fleet composed of paddle-steamers only. I narrowly escaped taking my passage in the *Austria*, which was burnt at sea: among those who perished, I remember, were several near relatives of Hermann Vezin.

Unfortunately I did not travel in the States, not even to Niagara. The New York of those days was very different from the city of to-day. Although, to my great regret (of that regret, and the reasons why Mrs. Bancroft and myself have never visited America professionally, more anon), I have only this early recollection of New York, I can tell of course from reading and conversation how

wondrously it has changed, or rather grown, for when I was there the Central Park was quite a country outing.

My visit was during the fall, so I came in for the lovely Indian summer, a far more beautiful and much longer autumnal visitation than the French *L'Eté de la St. Martin*, or the short gleam we sometimes get in England, that is called St. Luke's little summer.

The strange, palatial, gliding ferry-boats, the tall, rough telegraph-posts which then crossed and re-crossed the city, the many white houses with their green venetian shutters, the brown-stone mansions of Fifth Avenue, are as vivid in my remembrance as the, then, terribly paved and dirty streets (only to be rivalled in discomfort, as far as my small travels go, by the filthy lanes of Constantinople).

My theatrical recollections of New York include, at Laura Keene's, the production of a play destined to attain celebrity as *Our American Cousin*, in which I saw Sothern act Lord Dundreary for the very first time in his life; and some years afterwards, when we first met at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, I gave him a copy of the original play-bill which I chanced to have kept. Jefferson, since world-famous as Rip Van Winkle, was the Asa Trenchard. The whole performance was a very different one from that presented later at the Haymarket; but, beyond all dispute, it was Dundreary who made the play, always a very bad one, although through Sothern it enjoyed the then greatest run on record. Sothern, at the read-

ing of the piece, refused his part, and only on being given *carte blanche* to 'write it up' and do with it what he pleased, consented to appear in it. The odd stammer and eccentric walk which he introduced he had previously tried with success in small Canadian towns, where he began his Western career as Sir Frederick Blount in *Money;* its inspiration being really due to some funny antics of a nigger troupe known as Bryant's Minstrels. The long claret-coloured Noah's Ark coat which he wore on the first night he borrowed from Dion Boucicault, who was then acting at Niblo's; this dress was only once changed throughout the comedy, and then for a costume which would not have disgraced Wright in an old Adelphi farce—the coal-back whiskers were an exaggeration of the peg-top fashion then the rage, which also governed largely the cut of trousers and coat-sleeves. There was not for a long time any Brother Sam's letter or any allusion to that fraternal personage. The part grew slowly bit by bit, and instead of being exaggerated into an impossibility, as it might have been by an inferior actor, was, in fact, refined nightly in action and costume with the judgment and painstaking labour which always characterized this admirable comedian, of whom I shall hope later on to speak.

At Wallack's Theatre I had the rare treat of seeing James Wallack—then a lame and crippled old man, but still very handsome—act as Don Cæsar de Bazan, also in Douglas Jerrold's *Rent Day*, and Shylock in a

production of the *Merchant of Venice*, which followed on a smaller scale Charles Kean's revival at the Princess's. An amusing incident which occurred in the Trial Scene I fancy must have resulted from a practical joke played by some one behind the scenes. As Wallack came to the words, 'A harmless, necessary cat,' a large tabby, at first unseen by Shylock, marched upon the stage, to the dismay of the actors and the amusement of the audience; chevied from side to side by Gratiano and Bassanio, still further frightened by the roars of the audience, the poor brute at length jumped in terror over the heads of the convulsed Council of Ten, and, with this splendid exit, ruined the rest of the play.

This short visit to the States came to an end soon afterwards. I can only hope it is still in store for me to go there again, and in maturer life become acquainted with America. On my return I saw too plainly that my mother's health was greatly broken; she lingered some little time, but it soon grew evident that she would never recover.

I was present at the Princess's when Charles Kean retired from management. *Henry VIII.* was played, with Kean as Wolsey, and Mrs. Kean as Queen Katharine. The night was indeed one to well remember, as was the vast distinguished audience. Kean delivered a farewell managerial address, one point in which I can recall when he said how he had been blamed for mounting this or that play too sumptuously, while on the other hand

he was recently scolded for the rudeness and simplicity of the goblets he had used in Macbeth's Banqueting Hall, adding in his own quaint manner, 'it was the first time he ever heard that Macbeth had an eye to King Duncan's plate.' The night was altogether memorable, and even the afterpiece is worth recording, a farce written by Edmund Yates, called *If the Cap Fits*, acted by Walter Lacy, Frank Matthews, and Miss Julia Murray (now the wife of the distinguished reciter, Mr. Samuel Brandram), and last, and then least, for she was only a child, Miss Ellen Terry, who appeared as a dapper little tiger. Charles Kean's great services to the stage were publicly acknowledged at a banquet given in St. James's Hall, Mr. Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was at Eton with Kean, being among the speakers.

I mention my going at about this time to the Strand Theatre to see the burlesque on the *Lady of Lyons*, in which Charlotte Saunders and John Clarke were so popular in their personations of the two Napoleons, because there was a little farce called *Captain Charlotte* played on the same night, in which I saw Marie Wilton for the third time (and never again until we met upon the stage); I have no better remembrance of that performance, I am ashamed to say, than the ungallant one of thinking her the thinnest girl I had ever seen.

The splendid performance of that fine actor, Benjamin Webster, in the *Dead Heart*, is vividly

imprinted on my mind, as is also the *première* of the *Overland Route*, at the Haymarket; this comedy I witnessed several times—how amusing it was, and how well played by Charles Mathews and Buckstone, Compton and Chippendale, Mrs. Charles Mathews and Mrs. Wilkins. In the autumn of 1860, on one of the early nights of its brilliant career at the Adelphi, I remember my rapture at the *Colleen Bawn;* how well I recall the acting of Mr. and Mrs. Dion Boucicault as Myles-na-Coppaleen and Eily, of Miss Woolgar as Anne Chute, and Edmund Falconer as Danny Mann.

Without dwelling longer on these recollections, I will mention a very important night when I was among those who greeted that most famous of romantic actors, Charles Fechter, when he played *Ruy Blas* for the first time in English. This was followed soon by a revival of the *Corsican Brothers*, which I also saw produced. The first and second acts, I recollect, were then transposed, as they had been previously played by Fechter in France; the scenes in Paris, where Louis meets Chateau Renaud and is killed, preceding those at Fabian's home in Corsica, where he sees a vision of his brother's death.

These two delightful evenings shall close this hurried record; with them those early never-to-be-forgotten visits to the play—those nights that were the balm for many sad and weary days—came for ever to an end. The charm, the mystery, which had hung for years around the playhouse, and

chiefly made my dreams, were soon to be dispelled. 'The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,' were now to be revealed to me in all the barrenness of painted canvas; for, although in a very few days I was again in a theatre, I this time entered it by the stage-door.

CHAPTER V.

A COUNTRY ACTOR.

OFTEN as I went to the play, dearly as I loved the theatre, until I was one I never knew an actor, and very rarely had even seen one off the stage.

I got my own engagement. After addressing a shoal of letters to the lessees of leading country theatres, to most of which I received no answers, Mr. Mercer Simpson, of Birmingham, found something in my appeal, I suppose, a little removed from the ruck of such effusions, for he sent me an encouraging reply, and expressed a wish to see me. I was then a rather good-looking boy of nineteen, but seemed older, with an odd mixture, I fancy, of modesty and courage in my nature. I left my home with a very heavy heart, and a very light purse, on the first of January, 1861. It was a wretched cold day when I walked up New Street to the Theatre Royal, and sent in my name to Mr. Mercer Simpson —whose friendship I still retain. I remember well my awe at finding myself, for the first time, 'behind the scenes,' and my impressions of the dimly

lighted theatre as I stood close to the footlights and talked my stage-struck project over, when, after kind advice, it was arranged that I might regard myself as a member of the company, with a commencing salary of one guinea a week. Upon this modest weekly stipend of twenty-one shillings I feel some pride in saying that I lived; for the expected return to town of 'Roscius,' ragged and repentant, was what was, naturally enough, looked for by those who knew my bent.

A few nights later I made my first appearance on any stage under a big mask, as a courtier in the pantomime; and then played my first part, that of Lieutenant Manley, in Bayle Bernard's drama of *St. Mary's Eve.* A copy of the first play-bill in which my name appeared is the only Birmingham announcement I possess; but I have a list of all the parts I played while in the provinces, and of the theatres in which I acted them. I greatly regret now that all efforts I have made to keep a diary were unavailing. During the pantomime my work was not heavy. The opening plays were varied two or three times a week; a special 'blood-and thunder' repertoire, comprising such works as the *Bottle*, the *Lonely Man of the Ocean*, *Susan Hopley*, and *Thirty Years of a Gambler's Life*, being drawn upon for Saturdays, in which I appeared as the perpetrator, or victim, of a wide range of the vilest crimes.

The first 'star' in the theatrical firmament round

whom I humbly twinkled was Madame Celeste. I remember she was then spoken of as 'quite an old woman;' but, as she died twenty-two years later at the age of sixty-eight, I thought it a good instance of the rubbish so often circulated with regard to the ages of public characters. With this accomplished actress and charming woman I played in the old Adelphi dramas—the *Green Bushes* and the *Flowers of the Forest*. I next met poor Walter Montgomery, to my thinking an unappreciated actor, and perhaps a little too ambitious for his time. He was gifted with a remarkable memory, and was a reciter of marked excellence. He showed me many kindnesses, and took much interest in me then and afterwards. I often went to see him at the Hen and Chickens, in those days a celebrated old inn, but very likely now swept away, or eclipsed, by some company's palatial 'Limited' Hotel.

From the time I first appeared until the season ended in July, I played some thirty-six different parts; in many of them I must have been very bad, but I distinctly recall some small successes. The last 'star' that year was T. C. King, who was an excellent actor, but rarely seen in London; he took the Cork Theatre during the Birmingham vacation, and asked me to join him there at an advanced salary. A similar offer had been made to another member of the Birmingham company, who became my *compagnon de voyage*, and we started for our destination *viâ* Bristol, travelling there in a third-

class carriage, for neither of us had money to spare on a more luxurious conveyance.

When the steamer sailed for Cork, I sat upon one of the paddle-boxes as we steamed down the river and under the suspension-bridge that I had known as a boy when it crossed the Thames by old Hungerford Market. With 'youth at the prow,' though hardly 'pleasure at the helm,' I still thought it all very jolly; but hardly had St. Vincent's Rock faded from view than rain fell, and things began to wear a less cheerful aspect. The vessel was laden with cattle, and, as we had only secured 'deck tickets,' I sought shelter in the fore-cabin; but got no further than the companion-ladder, where I was checked by clouds of bad tobacco-smoke and other fumes, the forbidding-looking hole being full of boisterous soldiers; so I retreated to the wet deck. I soon was sea-sick; wrapped in a travelling shawl, I crouched with my companion, very desolate and sorry for myself, in the most protected corner we could find. I don't know how long I remained in this miserable condition, but I was roused from it by a friendly voice saying, 'I say, youngster, you don't seem used to this sort of thing. I'm the ship's carpenter, but have some duty to-night; you'd better turn in to my bunk.' Had the good fellow offered me the ship's value it would not have been more welcome, and, in a few minutes, I was peacefully asleep in the humble berth of my good Samaritan.

During my short engagement of thirty-six nights

at Cork I played forty fresh characters; so had little time for anything but work, long hours of the night being often devoted to copying out my part from a well-thumbed book which had to be passed on to another member of the little company, while the days were spent in study and rehearsal; for the performance was changed, or partly so, nearly every evening. It was reward enough, however, to know that the varied nature of the parts entrusted to me, and the incessant practice, did me great good; for I felt already that I might some day be a fair actor, and so went back to Birmingham full of hope and high spirits.

It was at this time I first had the pleasure to meet Mr. Kendal, who was then a very fair and handsome young fellow of about nineteen. I dare say he will remember, as well as I do, a certain 'tea-fight' at my lodgings, when my guests far exceeded the number of my chairs. My landlady was a remarkable person in a way, and suffered from a kind of chronic influenza which pervaded the poor woman's existence; for she had an extraordinary habit, when the attacks were at their worst, of entering articles of food in my little weekly bills, and the more extravagant accounts of other lodgers, in this fashion, possibly by way of provoking sympathy—'Broiled kidleys,' 'Milce pies,' 'Muttle chops,' 'Plack curralt jab,' 'Duck and greed Beas,' 'Sprig Chickel,' 'Maccarools.'

At the beginning of this season a ballet was pro-

duced, called the *Brigands of the Abruzzi*, in which I begged to be allowed to appear, thinking it would be good practice; to my amazement I was given the part taken at Covent Garden by the celebrated pantomimist W. H. Payne. I have not the smallest doubt I made a frightful hash of it, but I am equally certain it was as fine a month's training as I ever had, in more ways than one.

I then met Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean; which led to distinct advancement in the company and an increase of salary. I also played with two other then celebrated actors, Phelps and G. V. Brooke, whom I met at Birmingham for the first time, although the latter was but a wreck of former greatness. In *Othello* and in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, as Sir Giles Overreach, Brooke's acting was of the highest kind and quite remarkable. I distinctly remember being much impressed by the fact that in this part he wore the sword that once belonged to Edmund Kean. Before the season ended, during which I played sixty-four new parts, I had arranged to go for the summer weeks to Devonport; and having a few spare days, I spent them in London to see the Exhibition of that year, 1862, and so renewed my acquaintance with Dundreary, a performance which was then rapidly making Sothern's English reputation. I was also presented to the great-little Frederick Robson, whose son had recently joined the Birmingham company, and to whom I had been able to show some trifling kindness. When the boy

took me to see his father, I remember, while we were looking at some framed theatrical engravings, Robson stopping before one of them and saying, 'That man was one of the cleverest and most natural comedians I ever saw.' It was the portrait of Pearce, the Christy Minstrel and original singer of 'Hoop-de-dooden-do.' The health of the great actor was already broken, for Robson died not very long afterwards, when only little over forty years of age. No words of mine could do justice to my remembrance of this actor and genius, who is said to have resembled Edmund Kean in his wondrous bursts of passion, while in his comic moments he recalled memories of the great comedians of the past. Off the stage Robson was one of the mildest and most unassuming of creatures in the world. The very nervousness which made him so shy and reserved in private life, perhaps, stood him in wonderful stead directly he trod the stage: he then became at will the hero of domestic drama, the mock tyrant of burlesque, or the most amusing caricature in the world of farce.

Young Robson and I journeyed down to Devonshire together, and during the pleasant six or seven weeks we passed there I acted all sorts of parts in nearly every kind of play, and was entrusted for the first time with a leading *rôle*, Captain Murphy Maguire in the *Serious Family;* among other important characters, I played Captain Hawkesley in *Still Waters Run Deep.*

In the company was an amusing man, whose fes-

tive temperament made him, I fear, a little unreliable in the wonderful dramas, often nautical, which were a feature on Saturday nights, although very often, I dare say, his own words were as good as the author's. Sometimes, however, he could remember none, and then, with amazing effrontery, took refuge in a stock speech, which he delivered with great solemnity to whoever might be on the stage with him at the time, no matter what the circumstances, the period, or the costume of the play chanced to be. Whether prince or peasant, virtuous or vicious, whether clad in sumptuous raiment, or shivering in rags, it was all the same to him, and at the end of his harangue he stalked off the stage, leaving his unhappy comrade to get out of the difficulty as best he could, and bear the brunt of the position. These were the never-changing words, which I recall distinctly: 'Go to, thou weariest me. Take this well-filled purse, furnish thyself with richer habiliments, and join me at my mansion straight!' *Exit.*

The fame of Lord Dundreary was at this time at its height, owing to Sothern's great success, increased, no doubt, by the crowds who flocked to town to see the Exhibition. From my early remembrance of this 'creation' in America, and having recently renewed my appreciation of its humour, I was able to imitate Sothern so closely in the character as to be thought quite remarkable. I was showing off this trick one night in Plymouth, when my manager, who was present, prevailed on me to give the imitation

at the theatre, which had been but poorly attended during part of the summer season. I had the satisfaction, at least, of adding greatly to the receipts, for the house was nightly crammed until it closed, through my impertinence, of which the *Plymouth Telegraph* of September 6th, 1862, remarked: 'The principal attraction of the week has been the appearance of Lord Dundreary, who made his acquaintance with a Devonport audience under the most favourable circumstances. The lessee could, indeed, hardly have done better if he had engaged the original impersonator of his lordship, Mr. Sothern, for, by general consent, Mr. Bancroft has contrived to reproduce the character in facsimile; and his Lord Dundreary is as much like the original in dress, manner, action, and appearance as it possibly could be, and has shown not only a wonderful amount of imitative talent, but an appreciation of character without which imitation would be mere mimicry, and which stamps him as an able actor.'

While at Devonport, I received an offer from John Harris, of the Dublin Theatre Royal, to join his company in a higher position to that I was about to resume at Birmingham. This offer, Mercer Simpson, always my friend, advised me to accept, even allowing me to fill up a brief interval between the two engagements in his theatre. So I acted there in revivals of *Macbeth* and *King John*, for which James Anderson, the tragedian, was engaged. Through watching his acting one night at the wing in the

former character, I went straight upon the stage, dressed as Malcolm, for Macduff's great scene, and almost ruined it through having forgotten to remove my eye-glass. Anderson, I remember, carried his right arm in a sling, through a recent accident, and had to fight the broadsword combat at the end of the play with his left hand, no mean achievement, even for so accomplished a swordsman and athlete.

The Dublin company was headed by dear old Granby, the stage-manager, an admirable actor of the old school; early in the season we were made happy by a visit from Charles Mathews, who was accompanied by his former comrades Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews; the trio played together in a round of their favourite plays and the engagement was throughout delightful.

Acting for a month with this brilliant comedian could not fail to have some influence for the good on the efforts of an ambitious young actor, as I then was, and I felt deeply sorry when the curtain finally fell upon his stay. The mere mention of Charles Mathews's name fills the memory with a store of anecdotes about him; most of them, no doubt, have long since appeared. One little one, however, I remember which was told me at that time by Granby, who had been a member of his company when Mathews managed Covent Garden. I will venture to repeat it, having never seen it in print.

At the height of his troubles, when things went very badly, the expenses of the vast theatre being

ruinous, Mathews one morning saw a ballet-girl in a dark corner of the stage crying bitterly, and evidently in pain. The ever-gay comedian at once jauntily approached her (for nothing seemingly could dash his spirits), and said cheerily, 'What's the matter, my dear?' The girl sobbed in reply, 'Oh, Mr. Mathews, I am in such pain! I have got such a dreadful toothache!' 'Toothache!' said he; 'poor thing, I am so sorry. I'll let you off rehearsal; go and have the tooth out.' 'I can't, Mr. Mathews.' 'Can't, why not?' said he. 'I c-a-n't—aff-o-rd it,' blubbered the girl. 'Can't afford it! Nonsense!' answered Mathews; 'run round the corner to St. Martin's Lane, where you will get rid of it for a shilling.' 'But I haven't g-o-t a shilling, Mr. Mathews.' 'Not got a shilling?' he replied at once; 'neither have I. But come into the green-room, and I will take your tooth out myself!'

We then went from gay to grave, the Mathews month being followed by four weeks with the Keans. These 'stars' being accompanied by their satellites, J. F. Cathcart and George Everett, the stock company took smaller parts than usual, the cast of the plays being in this way greatly strengthened.

I hope my vanity will be pardoned for relating an incident I remember after acting in *Much Ado about Nothing*. On the following evening I was seated in the green-room, when Charles Kean entered dressed as Othello. He sat down, and after staring at me some time in a way which rather frightened

me, beckoned to me to go near him. I advanced, fearing I had innocently distressed him on the stage. To my great surprise he said, 'Sir, I was at the wing last night waiting to go on, and heard you give Borachio's difficult speech in the last act. I can only say that if I were still the lessee of a London Theatre, it would be your own fault if you were not a member of my company.' I stammered out some words of thanks for this unexpected compliment, which was paid to me before a full green-room; fortunately I was 'called' almost directly for the stage, and so was able to beat a blushing retreat.

Kean, although at this time not quite fifty-two, had the appearance and manner of a much older man, and he was watched and guarded with what seemed unnecessary fuss by those around him. At rehearsal the green baize was laid down on the stage, the gas lighted, the stage enclosed—precautions which were taken for no other person. His memory was growing treacherous, especially in long soliloquies, as, for instance, the fall of Wolsey; either Cathcart or Everett would then be always at the wings to prompt him, while Mrs. Kean, ever the most devoted woman in the world, would hover round the scenes to stop the smallest noise. One night I witnessed a very comic incident, through her absolutely insisting on a member of the company, who was crossing the back of the stage on tip-toe, taking off his boots *because they creaked*, and continuing his journey to the stage-door in his stockinged feet.

Mrs. Kean was a most amiable and charming lady, but evidently, it seemed to me, now ill at ease in the parts she still played, such as Portia or Beatrice, although her perfect elocution and sweet voice almost made you forget she was no longer young; while, in spite of his failing health, there were moments of impetuous passion and wondrously effective rapid change of manner in Charles Kean's acting always to be remembered—notably in his scene with Tubal when he acted Shylock (said to be a reproduction of his father's method) in the third act of *Othello*, the close of *Richard the Third*, and throughout *Louis the Eleventh*. As a comedian he was also admirable; witness his acting as Benedick, as Mr. Oakley, or as Mephistopheles. In venturing to give this opinion it may be worth while to recall Garrick's advice to Jack Bannister, when he said, 'You may humbug the town as a tragedian, but comedy is a serious thing, my boy, so don't try that just yet.'

Many are the stories of Kean; most of them doubtless have been often told, but perhaps one or two have so far escaped record. He was, as has previously been mentioned, easily upset, when acting, by even a trifling noise. Years ago a habit prevailed in a seaport town he visited, among the occupants of the gallery of the theatre, of cracking nuts throughout the performance. This played havoc with Kean when he acted there. On the following morning he called those who travelled

with him together, and, after loudly bewailing his sufferings and anathematizing the gallery boys, gave instructions to his followers to go into the town and buy up every nut within its walls, either in the shops or on the quays. This was done. The result for the two following evenings was perfect success, crowned by the chuckles of the tragedian; but oh, the third night!

The fruiterers, perplexed by the sudden and unaccountable demand for nuts, had sent to Covent Garden and other sources for a plentiful supply to meet its hoped-for continuance; the demand fell off, there was a glut in the local market, the nuts so deluged the town that they were sold more abundantly and cheaper than ever. Crack!—crack!—crack! was the running fire throughout the succeeding performances, and the rest of Kean's engagement was fulfilled in torment.

At this time my first offer to join a London company reached me; it came from Mr. Frank Matthews, who was about to undertake the management of the St. James's Theatre. After carefully thinking it over I decided on having the advantage of more country practice, and declined the flattering proposal; had I accepted it, I should have found my future wife a member of the company. Many good parts fell to my lot, both in dramas and old comedies; the latter Granby greatly loved, his long acquaintance with them, and skill in their stage-management, being of great value to a young actor like myself.

On a command night, given by the then Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Carlisle, we played *A Cure for the Heartache* and *To Parents and Guardians.* As the part of Monsieur Tourbillon, the old French usher, fell, to my amazement, to my lot, I could not complain of neglect in the way of variety.

At about Easter there was an annual amateur performance, which attracted great attention in Vice-Regal and garrison circles; through these I made the acquaintance, which has since ripened into friendship, of Mr. Walter Creyke, then Lord Carlisle's private secretary, and the Hon. Lewis Wingfield, both admirable amateurs.

This engagement was followed by Italian Opera, during which the dramatic company was sent *en masse* to Cork, to support G. V. Brooke, who acted sometimes during this engagement with much of his old fire. No man made himself more beloved by the companies he met. I and other youngsters at this time owed much to his kindness and hospitality.

There was comparatively little study during our stay at Cork, and we had many happy outings to Blarney Castle and the neighbourhood. Brooke went back with us to Dublin, and there acted for the first time the part of Coriolanus. He took enormous pains in the production, and his own acting was superb; but the play failed to attract. The title reminds me of an anecdote of days gone by, concerning its right pronunciation. Two theatre-goers were arguing in one of the old coffee-houses whether

the hero should be called *Cor*iolanus or Co-*ri*-olanus. Each failed to convince the other, when some one in the room informed them that he chanced to know the tragedy would be acted at Covent Garden one evening in the following week. The disputants laid a wager and decided to settle it by going to the theatre the night before, and accepting as final the pronunciation adopted by the actor who would, as was the custom in those days, 'give out' the performance for the following evening. News of the bet somehow reached the ears of John Kemble, and he himself came before the curtain and made the following speech: 'Ladies and gentlemen, to-morrow evening will be acted by his Majesty's servants, Shakespeare's tragedy Co-*ri*-olanus, in which your humble servant will have the honour to perform the part of *Cor*iolanus.'

At the close of the season (during which I had played sixty-four new parts and repeated many old ones) I was cast for Captain Thornton in *Rob Roy*, and when the information came to me I remember what I suffered, one great effect in the play being a broadsword combat between Thornton and the 'Dougal creature.' Although I fenced fairly well, and through long and careful rehearsal, at first with eyeglasses, had never come to grief, a fierce and much prolonged broadsword fight, with all sorts of strokes—some being made while turning round and with a crowded gallery on a Saturday night gloating over them all—was quite another matter. However,

I said nothing of my fears; my brother actor was patient with my need of frequent practice, and all went fortunately and well. My dread, however, was so great that often later I have lost effective parts like Richmond sooner than run the risk of killing a tyrant king in earnest, through not seeing his Majesty. I then went for a month's special engagement to my old home in Birmingham, Mercer Simpson having asked me to play the Counsel for the Defence in Dion Boucicault's drama, *The Trial of Effie Deans.*

I only reached Birmingham a day before the play's production, so had but one rehearsal. The Counsel for the Defence, although appearing only in the trial scene, was a very important part, being played in London by the author himself. Of course I arrived quite perfect in the words; but when I was half-way through the scene, Boucicault, who was on the stage, having travelled down from London specially, and whom I then met for the first time, came quietly to me and said, 'You are all wrong about this part, my dear fellow; let me rehearse the rest of the scene for you. I can see your intelligence, and I fancy you will grasp my view of it directly.' I thanked him for his kindness, and after rehearsal went away to model my performance entirely upon his, for I saw at once how right he was, and how wrong I had been. The result was a considerable success on my part, the credit of which was chiefly due to one half-hour with Boucicault.

From Birmingham I went straight to Devonport,

having arranged to again spend the summer weeks there. Among the company were Mrs. Robertson and her daughter Madge, then a young girl in her early teens, but already faintly foreshadowing the brilliant career and position she has enjoyed as Mrs. Kendal.

How happy one was in those days—or how happy one now thinks one was! for the pleasures of life, I take it, are chiefly retrospective or anticipative, rarely actual. Anyway, I seem to remember that I had six weeks of very hard but pleasant work, studying thirty new more or less leading parts, and recovering many old ones; leaping, perhaps on alternate nights, from John Mildmay in *Still Waters Run Deep*, to Fernando Villabella in Byron's burlesque of the *Maid and the Magpie*, or from Murphy Maguire to Beppo in *Fra Diavolo*. I also repeated the Dundreary imitation in a farce called *Sam's Arrival*, which had been acted at the Strand Theatre by a favourite actor, William Belford. Before reappearing in Dublin I paid a brief visit to London, when Walter Montgomery had a season at the Princess's Theatre, for which he made me an offer in the following way:

'9, Langham Street,
Friday afternoon.

'DEAR BANCROFT,

'"I remember thee, and I remember thee well worthy of my praise." Come and join me at the Princess's, if only for a little time—open in Lorenzo (with such a pretty Jessica), and Christian in *Not a*

Bad Judge. I am here every morning up to twelve. Come to-morrow and see me; at least, I shall have the pleasure of shaking you by the hand. Come to me.

'Yours very truly,

'WALTER MONTGOMERY.'

Although I did not entertain the offer, I stayed in London to be present at his performance of Shylock and Lavater.

The Dublin season commenced with the production of Edmund Falconer's drama *Peep-o'-Day*, chiefly acted by an organized travelling company. An old friend, Miss Cleveland (Mrs. Arthur Stirling), to whom I was indebted for much kindness in my early days at Birmingham, played the heroine, and I was the Captain Howard; my only remembrance of the part being the effort it cost me to learn the incidental Irish jig, which I eventually succeeded in accomplishing to the satisfaction of the 'Dublin boys.' A visit from Madame Celeste followed, and I then played leading parts with her and other celebrities.

Fortune was kind to me after this heavy strain of work, for it was followed by the engagement of Sothern, who then visited Ireland for the first time, and whose programme for a fortnight remained unchanged.

It was at this time I had the pleasure of giving Sothern the bill of his first appearance as Lord Dundreary, which I had treasured since its performance

in New York, and which had now naturally grown to be very interesting to him. Sothern, who I suppose must have been afflicted with the mania that his true vocation was that of a serious actor, revived during this engagement a powerful but gloomy play called *Retribution*, which was originally acted at the Olympic by Alfred Wigan, George Vining, and the lovely Miss Herbert. I, by this time, had grown to the position of a local favourite, and achieved considerable success in the part of Oscar de Beaupré, quite as fine a character to act, I think, as the Count Priuli, which was played by Sothern.

One night when this drama was acted, Sothern's inability to control his suffering under the least inattention to his performance on the part of anyone among the audience, met with a rebuff, which I cannot refrain from relating, although it tells against the actor. The play was dull, and going badly; the scanty attendance did not improve Sothern's temper, and he was greatly vexed by the chattering of two occupants of a large stage-box, who arrived late, and seemed more amused by the remembrance of their dinner than by his acting.

Towards the middle of the play one of the two men, who was a tremendous dandy, perhaps unthinkingly, and from mere boredom, quite turned his back upon the stage, and fixed his opera-glasses, with as much of his attention as at the moment he gave to anything, upon the audience. Sothern grew more and more angry. Soon the man in the box palpably

yawned, looked at his watch, got up from his seat, reached down a large fur-lined overcoat, and in full view of the audience put it on. Sothern groaned. The prominent occupant of the box put away his glasses, loudly clicked the case in doing so, put them in his pocket, and then, with a bang, opened his opera-hat. Sothern could stand it no longer, and as his innocent tormentor turned to leave the box he addressed him, 'Sir.' The heavy swell paused and looked calmly at Sothern, who, with a winning smile, said blandly, 'I beg your pardon, there is another act.' He got this answer: '*Ya-as, that is why I am going.*'

Although the public did not care for *Retribution*, the play was the means of Sothern interesting himself on my behalf, and being always my good friend. Presuming that I wanted eventually to get to London, he thought Dublin was too far off, across the 'streak of silver sea,' and advised me to get to Alexander Henderson's theatre in Liverpool, as the best stepping-stone.

More hard work, greatly to my advantage, followed, for G. V. Brooke succeeded Sothern, and on this visit I had the privilege of supporting him in all the second parts in the tragedies he played. The memory of then being brought so closely in association with poor Brooke is saddened by the thought that we never met again. A few years later came the sad death he met so nobly when he went down in the Bay of Biscay on board the *London*.

Gustavus Vaughan Brooke reminded me more than any actor whom I ever saw of Salvini. The Irishman, like the Italian, was gifted with a noble voice, and a natural dignity of bearing. His death in *Othello* always seemed to me as poetic in conception as it was pathetic in execution. Acting, although not speaking, the closing words, 'Killing myself, to die upon a kiss,' he staggered towards the bed, dying as he clutched the heavy curtains of it, which, giving way, fell upon his prostrate body as a kind of pall, disclosing, at the same time, the dead form of Desdemona.

My Dublin engagement was soon to come to an end, for I read of an approaching change in Liverpool, and, remembering Sothern's advice, I wrote at once to Mr. Henderson, who communicated with Sothern on the matter, and then telegraphed an acceptance of my proposal to join him at Eastertime. Until then I had a continued round of work, in plays which included an elaborate production of the *Ticket of Leave Man*, the scenery being specially painted by Hawes Craven, who was then the artist to the theatre, and whose work the Lyceum stage has since made known to the playgoing world.

I was given a part which was as great a surprise then, to me, as it may be to some of my readers to be told now, that of Bob Brierly, the Lancashire hero. Strange as it all seems now, I can truly say that no performance added so much to my Dublin reputation.

Lord Carlisle selected this year the *Heir at Law* for his command night, and as Dick Dowlas, before an audience adorned with all the show and glitter of uniforms and levee dress, the curtain fell upon my career in John Harris's beautiful theatre. Whatever that career may have been worth, however much or little I may yet know of my art, to the two long seasons of hard work I passed there I owe a large share of my success as an actor, and my stay in Dublin has a foremost place in my happiest remembrances.

When I first went to Liverpool I severely felt the contrast between the great Dublin theatre and the little house in Clayton Square, which, however, proved a fine field for practice, and I soon found myself at home, being heartily welcomed by Lionel Brough, who a short time previously had become an actor. I made my first appearance as the hero in Watts Phillips's play, *Paul's Return*, which had been produced in London at the Princess's Theatre. We were now on the eve of the Shakespearean Tercentenary, when the poet's memory was honoured by performances of his plays in nearly every English-speaking theatre. Alfred Wigan was specially engaged by Henderson to appear as Shylock and Hamlet. These performances, I feel bound to say, added nothing to the reputation of the accomplished comedian, which is best proved, perhaps, by their never having been repeated; my own share in the production was a revival of

Irish memories in the characters of Gratiano and Laertes.

I made many friends in Liverpool, and passed a happy time there. Among other frolics, which surviving companions will remember as well as myself, I recall frequent midnight drives, after acting in Liverpool, in a dog-cart from Birkenhead to Chester, a distance, if I remember rightly, of hard on twenty miles. How we risked our young necks, and what a life we led the toll-keepers and the slumbering villagers! Well may one sigh and say with Robertson, 'O youth, youth! priceless, inestimable treasure!'

The Pyne and Harrison Company being engaged to give a series of English Opera in Liverpool, Henderson arranged to go over to Dublin with the whole of his troupe for a month's starring engagement, and so I unexpectedly renewed for a brief time my acquaintance with many old friends. The remembrance of my services was shown by the warmth of the reception I received from the audience directly I stepped upon the stage, which was so prolonged as to bring the actors to the wings to see who could be the object of such an ovation. I look back with keen pleasure to that month, when, few rehearsals only being necessary, I saw for the first time the beauties of the county Wicklow; for during my long stay in Dublin I had been far too busy to even think of getting further away from its streets than Sandymount. Just as a dweller in Westminster, living almost in the shadow of its towers, rarely enters the

Abbey, until, perhaps, some country cousin comes to town to be shown the sights, I, during nearly two years' residence, saw scarcely anything, while in a month—being, so to speak, a visitor—I went everywhere.

At the close of our stay I remember the *Serious Family* was played for a benefit, when I had the impertinence to act Murphy Maguire (always a favourite part of mine) with an attempt at a brogue, before an Irish audience. We soon were back again in Liverpool, and during the summer the celebrated burlesque company from the Strand Theatre delighted Liverpool by acting for a short time there; it was then that Marie Wilton and I first met. It was here also that I commenced a friendship with one who, I think, can claim me now as his oldest professional comrade, John Hare. He was then a young fellow of twenty, and had come to Liverpool accompanied by that once brilliant actor, Leigh Murray, whose pupil he had been, to make his first appearance on the stage. The friendship between Hare and myself soon became close, and there are few remembrances keener in my mind than frequent visits to his rooms, where Leigh Murray stayed with him for a time, and who, although suffering severely from asthma and terribly crippled by rheumatism, was one of the most delightful companions I have known. His fund of anecdote and the graphic relation of his own experiences were almost lessons in acting, not likely to be forgotten by an enthusiast.

Some three or four of us, whose names are now well known to theatre-goers, were listening to his pleasant talk one night, when I remember well his saying, 'And what may not you boys yet do upon the stage! You remind me of my own early days, now more than twenty years ago, when four young fellows, who were acting at Murray's old theatre in Edinburgh, used to chat over their future prospects, as you have been doing now. They were all youngsters then, much of an age and quite unknown; their names being Barry Sullivan, Lester Wallack, Leigh Murray, and Sims Reeves.' When Murray returned to London he and I kept up a regular correspondence. From a bundle of his interesting letters I select the following answer to a request that he would add his signature to an old photograph which I forwarded for the purpose:

'29, New Bridge Street, Blackfriars,
Dec. 22, 1864.

'DEAR BANCROFT,

'I have been, and am still, very ill indeed, and confined to my bed; but I hastily sketch a few lines to thank you very much for the budget of news, which, I assure you, alleviated the horrors of a particularly bad day. I cannot now attempt to reply beyond briefly reciprocating the good wishes usual at this "festive season." I hope I *may* have a "happy new year," but a "merry Christmas" I cannot expect, for I fear I shall pass *the* day, as I have for the last four years, in bed! I sincerely hope you will enjoy yourself, as all good fellows should.

'I return the photograph of the faded comedian with the rheumatic autograph attached. I have passed the blotting-paper over the signature that the caligraphy may be as faint as the "counterfeit presentment" itself; too prophetic a significance of the fame and memory of him who now subscribes himself

'Very faithfully yours,

'LEIGH MURRAY.'

We gave a strange performance next of a play which had attracted some attention at the Princess's Theatre—Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, with the Brothers Webb as the two Dromios. I played Antipholus of Syracuse, and Hare presented a very quaint figure as Dr. Pinch, a schoolmaster. The Webbs also acted in the *Courier of Lyons*—Henry appearing as Dubosc, the villain, and Charles as Lesurques, who is innocently accused of the other's crime. I made some success in the part of Courriol, and Hare gave the first sign of his power in the art of making up in a small part of a very old man.

The notorious Davenport Brothers, fresh from their so-called spiritual manifestations in London, were at this period starting on a provincial tour, accompanied by a fellow-conjuror, called Fay, and 'Dr.' Ferguson, who acted in the capacity of lecturer. Henderson arranged to give a private *séance* in his rooms, and I was one of the invited. The 'manifestations' were certainly of the most bewildering

kind, and the oily humbug of old Ferguson very calculated to deceive. The troupe appeared in public at St. George's Hall, where their mysterious cabinet, their ropes, their unseen music and vanishing hands created great discussion; the trick of it all has long since been exposed and laid bare, among others, notably by Henry Irving, soon afterwards, at Manchester. But for their inference that they were indebted for their ends to spiritual means, all would have gone well; this the Lancashire boys would not stand, and set themselves to work to arrange such knots as no spirits could succeed in tying or untying. The end was rebellion and riot—the mysterious cabinet was smashed to fragments by some among the infuriated audience, who jumped upon the platform, while others pursued the wretched Davenports and their confederates, who with great difficulty escaped with their lives; they arrived torn and panting, all armed with revolvers, at the stage-door of the theatre while we were acting, seeking a refuge, which Henderson gave them, letting them out later by a private way to reach their lodgings and to catch the first departing train.

The occasion was taken advantage of by Henderson to produce an apropos sketch called the *Knotting'em Brothers*, Hare being marvellously made up to resemble one of the conjurors, while Blakeley was immensely amusing as a bewildered old gentleman.

Then came what was always pleasant to me, another meeting with Sothern, who appeared first in

David Garrick. Blakeley, I recollect, played old Ingot ; Lionel Brough, Squire Chevy ; and Hare, the stuttering Mr. Jones. Sothern also acted, for the first time I think, Sir Charles Coldstream in *Used up*, when Lydia Thompson, if my memory does not betray me, was the Mary, and I was cast for Ironbrace the blacksmith. I also supported him in a new farce called *My own Victim*, which was a stupid affair, although written by Maddison Morton, and never afterwards revived. I faintly remember Sothern, with a padded wig which gave him a ' water-on-the-brain ' appearance, offering everybody in the piece shrimps from a bag, and Hare darting in and out of doors as a little comic waiter.

A new comedy called the *Woman in Mauve*, and written by Watts Phillips, was got to work upon for a tentative performance. It began well enough, and had amusing bits in it, but was not a good play. (The Liverpool verdict was very much endorsed in London, when Sothern tried it at the Haymarket.) Hare acted the ex-policeman afterwards taken by Compton. I recall an amusing incident. The leading characters in the second act were joining in the chorus to a song sung by Sothern, Hare beating time with a telescope, which he used throughout the play as a kind of memory of his former truncheon. One night the audience roared with laughter, louder and louder at each successive verse ; the actors doubled their exertions, Hare especially, who attributed part of their enjoyment to the vigorous use of

his impromptu *bâton*—when Sothern, who was next to him, suddenly discovered that various articles of costume used by Hare as padding were, one by one, emerging from beneath his coat, and forming an eccentric-looking little heap upon the stage. The audience roared louder than ever, Hare beating time with renewed fierceness, when Sothern whispered, 'Never mind, old fellow; don't take any notice; don't look down!' Of course Hare did look down at once; he saw what had happened, and bolted in confusion, leaving us to finish the scene as best we could without him.

I now come to a visit which was destined to greatly influence my future life, and renewed my acquaintance with Marie Wilton, who arrived to play a short starring engagement prior to becoming the manager of a London Theatre, with Mr. Byron as her partner; rumours to this effect having recently been theatrical gossip. Miss Wilton appeared in some of the famous Strand Theatre burlesques, also in Planché's charming comedy *Court Favour;* in this piece she and I acted together for the first time, she as Lucy Morton, I as the Duke of Albemarle. My performance of this and of other parts (which Miss Wilton had seen as a spectator) led to the offer of an engagement from herself and Mr. Byron in their new enterprise, which I accepted. Having resisted several temptations to appear in London, including a proposal to join Fechter at the Lyceum, it may be thought unwise that I should have settled to go

to a little obscure theatre, which was to be opened in a speculative way, with burlesque, at least until success in comedy should justify its abandonment, as the staple attraction; with no better immediate prospect than a second-rate part in a comedietta, which must begin at half-past seven. All this, I own, may seem strange; but the most prosaic of my readers will perhaps forgive some apparent want of sense, if I acknowledge a secret that I then did not dare confess even to myself. I was already a victim to an emotion which will be sung of by poets for ever, but which, after all, is told in four very simple English words—*love at first sight.*

The last stars with whom I acted as a member of Henderson's company were the Wigans, who added to their repertoire Lord Lytton's comedy *Money*, Captain Dudley Smooth being my farewell part as a country actor. Part of the cast, I think, deserves recording. Alfred Evelyn was acted for the first time by Alfred Wigan; Sir John Vesey was played by Blakeley; Captain Dudley Smooth, as I have said, by myself; Edward Saker was the Graves; Lionel Brough the Stout; and the irascible old member of the club, whose time is passed in calling for the snuff-box, was given to Hare; Lady Franklin being played by Mrs. Alfred Wigan. For my share in this performance, as for many other early efforts in Liverpool, I was warmly praised and greatly encouraged in the local press by Mr. E. R. Russell, since M.P. for Glasgow.

My engagement then ended, and on the following day I went to London.

During this apprenticeship of four years and as many months I had attempted, no one knows better than myself how often inadequately, three hundred and forty-six parts. Of course I repeated many of those in standard plays, and some of them often, not only in different theatres, but with different actors (alone of the greatest service); an average, in fact, of between eighty and ninety parts each year, not counting short vacations—practice which no young actor in this or any other country can now obtain. The stock provincial companies, both here and abroad, are all dispersed, and the country theatres occupied by a perpetual succession of travelling troupes; in which, it seems to me, the art of acting means but a parrot copy of the original in town. No question, therefore, is more difficult to answer than the one so often put—'How am I to become an actor?' But it is no more my wish or purpose to attempt an essay on the subject than it is to compare the advantages of the old days with what may be said in favour of the new. I have never yet made up my mind whether, fond as I was of my work, I had any particular what may be called 'vocation' for the stage, and certainly have never been so absurd as to imagine myself a heaven-born genius. I don't know how much of such success as an actor as I can lay claim to is due to qualities which would not have been thrown away in other callings; but perhaps I

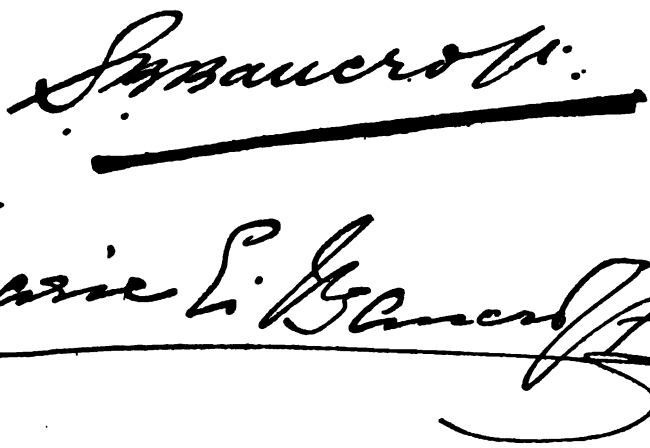
may be forgiven if I choose myself to illustrate, as best I have the power, the result of the kind of work which I did in my youth. No actor, perhaps, has suffered in one way more than I have through having made some early success in a certain marked line of character, which, but for great efforts on my own part, I might have submitted to the doom of playing always. Long runs of successful plays, lasting for several years, made it very hard for both audiences and critics (especially as many people fostered the fable I never could account for, that my early manhood was passed in the mess-rooms of cavalry barracks instead of the drudgery of country theatres) to accept my humble efforts in parts other than those typical of military swelldom; which gave me double work to secure what praise I have earned in subsequent performances.

Years ago, when first I played, for instance, Joseph Surface and Triplet, or, later on, Count Orloff in *Diplomacy*, such *power* as I may have possessed to act those parts (my argument not being a question of physical adaptability) was at least quite as great, and, in proportion to the difficulty, much greater than the skill I may have shown in originating, as it were, a new type of swell, which has grown to the dignity of being described as a 'Bancroft part.' It may seem strange for me to speak thus of myself, and again I beg to be excused for doing so; but my early training permitted me to fill gaps, at least in a workmanlike way, in the casts of many and various

plays, for which I never should have been suggested but by those who knew of and remembered it. I would cite, for instance, Joseph Surface, Tom Stylus the Prince of Morocco (which, although a small part, dominates the scene for a sufficient time), Triplet, Sir George Ormond, Faulkland, and Count Orloff, characters all differing very widely from the modern swelldom of either Captain Hawtree or Jack Poyntz, and which may some day in the future encourage me to the study of still a different mould.

With these brief references to parts of which I hope further on to speak again, I leave my records of those early days, and presently shall come to matters more serious to my fate and future which followed when I found myself a London actor.

Our joint Narrative:



CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S THEATRE, 1865-66.

RESUMED BY MRS. BANCROFT.

I NOW come to the point where I have to tell how it came about that I was ever the manager of a London theatre. While greatly exercised in my mind with regard to the future, and very anxious to better my prospects, I one morning called, in a casual way, on my sister, Mrs. Francis Drake, and talked over my position, as I had often done before, for she and her husband knew well my anxiety to act comedy. *What* to do for the best, or *how* to do it, I could not imagine. My brother-in-law advised me to write to the leading managers, who then, it must be remembered, were few in number, and theatres where my services might be useful could be almost counted on the fingers of one hand, for an engagement to play comedy. I told him that I had done so several times, only to meet with refusals. Mr. Buckstone replied that if I would continue burlesque he would give me an engagement at once, as he could only associate me with 'the merry sauciness

of that wicked little boy Cupid.' I was in despair, and did not know what to do. Mr. Drake, then, after a pause, said, 'I see no chance for you but management. How would it be if you had a theatre of your own?' A dead silence ensued. I looked at my sister, and she looked at me. My heart seemed to stop beating, and, like a lull after a storm, everything for the moment appeared to stand still. The mere thought of such a thing was bewildering. I could not realize the position, and thought I must be dreaming. My sister, who was always sanguine about anything I undertook, said, 'Yes, that is what you must do.' I thought they were mad, and, after looking hard at them both to assure myself that they were not dangerous, I murmured, 'But the money! I can't take a theatre without money, and you know I haven't a penny in the world.' Mr. Drake answered, 'Come again to-morrow morning; in the meantime Emma and I will talk the matter over, and see what can be done.' What could they mean? All that night I dreamt of nothing but crowded houses, and money rolling in so fast that I couldn't hold it. The next day I kept my appointment to the moment, wondering what would be proposed. Mr. Drake said, 'I will lend you a thousand pounds if you can find a theatre to let for a time; should you succeed you will return the money, if you fail I will lose it. Should it prove a big success, you can pay a liberal interest, which I will give as a present to your mother.' My sister added laughingly, 'Come,

Marie, don't be nervous; you are sure to succeed. Remember the old witch, who said that everything you undertake you are bound to prosper in. You are very lucky for others, why not try for yourself?'

Apropos of this remark, perhaps a little story which prompted it may be interesting. I give it for what it is worth. Years ago, one evening when my mother and I were chatting over the past, present, and future, she related to me an incident in which, although it occurred when I was only a few weeks old, I played the principal part. One night in a little out-of-the-way Yorkshire village, my mother was aroused by my crying and moaning; her efforts to soothe me were unavailing, and in the morning she found that my little body was completely covered with finger-and-thumb marks, as if I had been pinched. A doctor was sent for, but his prescriptions were useless. The next day an old peasant woman coming up the garden to sell her wares was attracted by my mother's sad face as she hushed me in her arms. 'What's t' matter wi' t' bairn?' she asked. My mother, who was little more than a girl herself, answered, 'My baby, I fear, is going to die;' upon which the old woman replied, 'Nay, nay, p'r'aps not; let's ha' a look at t' bairn.' When she saw the strange marks, she exclaimed, 'Don't ee cry no more, ma lass; gi' thanks, for t' bairn's bewitched!' 'What!' screamed my mother, nearly dropping me. 'T' bairn's bewitched, I tell thee; at sunset those

marks will disappear, and 'twill be the luckiest bairn you ever know'd of: she'll tell o' things afore they come to pass, and bring good to them she wishes to, and woe to them as wrongs her.' The old woman seemed quite tragic for the moment, and begged for a scrap of my hair, saying, 'Put it into t' bairn's hand that *she* may gi' it to me hersen.'

The woman went away rejoicing, stopping to look back once or twice as she passed up the road. The marks disappeared as she had prophesied, for I need scarcely say my mother, being young and credulous, watched the clock and the departing sun. The report spread quickly, for the next morning, and frequently until we went away, the village tradesfolk would call to kiss me, which they said would bring them a good day; and as they left the house would look with envy at my mother, and exclaim, 'Wonderful, missus!' (which expression has been for years a sort of joke in my family, and to this day when anything surprising occurs, it is met with the exclamation, 'Wonderful, missus!'). I can well remember when but a child being often asked to post letters which contained requests—the sender declaring they would then be surely granted. I have had little gifts simply to speak to tradespeople in their shops, and even now many with whom I deal avow that whenever I have called they have had 'a busy day.' My poor mother grew superstitious, she told me, from the moment the old woman's prophecy came true.

But to resume. Of course a thousand pounds at that time went further than that sum would now, and it seemed to me such a big fortune that all the theatres in London might be taken with it. Among other friends, I told my news to Mr. Byron, who I knew was about to sever his connection with the Strand Theatre. He thought it would be a very dangerous experiment, but I urged that if I failed, I should at least have the opportunity of showing the managers what I could do, and might afterwards have less difficulty in getting an engagement.

Being now quite resolved upon my speculation, I proposed a partnership, if a theatre could be found, Mr: Byron to give me his exclusive services as an author. As he was not in a position to provide money, he stipulated to be indemnified from sharing any losses that might occur. I felt that some such arrangement would greatly strengthen my position, knowing Mr. Byron's popularity, and his expressed willingness to write comedies. Then arose the difficulty where to find a suitable theatre? I talked over my project with Mr. A. C. Troughton, who had been so pleased with my performance in his comedietta, *Unlimited Confidence*, and from him I learnt that the Queen's Theatre, in Tottenham Street, was in the market. We made inquiries, and were told that it was *not* to let, but that an arrangement might be made with Mr. James, the lessee.

This theatre had gone through strange and varied fortunes, and had been known by many names since

its title of 'The King's Concert Rooms,' when first built by Signor Pasquale, the father of the once celebrated singer. Among its former lessees was Mr. Brunton, the father of the celebrated Mrs. Yates, the mother of Edmund Yates. The beautiful Mrs. Nisbett also once held the reins, while Madame Vestris and Madame Celeste were frequent stars there; it having, besides, been the first English home of the French plays, and there the great Frédéric Lemaître first acted in this country. But, in spite of such attractions, it then knew little else than evil days, and for many years had become again quite a minor theatre.

I was implored by everyone I consulted to reflect before entering upon such an enterprise. 'The neighbourhood was awful,' 'The distance too great from the fashionable world,' and 'Nothing would ever make it a high-class theatre.' People shrugged their shoulders, and I could see that failure was foretold in every feature. So I stood alone, without one word of encouragement. Mr. Byron grew less sanguine, and entreated me, before proceeding further, to go with him and talk the matter over with an old and valued friend of his (and since of mine) Mr. J. M. Levy, whose sound practical judgment and kindly feeling we might rely on. I told my story, Mr. Levy seemed pleased with my courage, and was altogether favourably inclined towards the undertaking. He thought, at the same time, it would be wise for me to appear in burlesque, for at least the start, and

not to risk losing that following of the public which had been accustomed to see me in that class of play. He suggested that Mr. Byron might then write a comedy, and give me the opportunity I sought, and, if successful, I could gradually abandon burlesque altogether.

I went home determined to follow this good advice, and invented for my managerial motto, '*Du courage et de la bonne humeur.*' An arrangement was entered into with Mr. James for a period of two years, to commence at Easter, by the terms of which he was to receive twenty pounds a week for rental, and his services as acting-manager combined; while Mr. Byron and myself were each to draw a weekly salary of ten pounds, and I was to receive an additional ten pounds a week towards the repayment of the sum to be advanced. After these deductions we were jointly to share all profits. Mr. Drake introduced me to the London and Westminster Bank, St. James's Square, on January 21st, 1865, when an account was opened in my name, with the sum he had agreed to advance. The formal receipt for the thousand pounds (which was returned to me when I had repaid the money) bears the same date.

The text of the document I signed indemnifying Mr. Byron from all pecuniary risk (which will be further alluded to when our story reaches the dissolution of partnership between Mr. Byron and myself), was as follows: 'In consideration of one thousand pounds advanced by me for preliminary

and after expenses attending the decorating, advertising, payment of salaries, etc., of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, I am to receive ten pounds a week for two years, in addition to a salary which will be equal to yours. By this arrangement the thousand pounds will be paid me back by the end of the second year: this sum of ten pounds to come out of the profits of the theatre; should the weekly receipts fall below the expenses, the ten pounds to be paid out of the previous profits, so long as there are any to draw upon. At the end of our tenancy, should the thousand pounds be lost, or any portion thereof, I am not to have any claim on you for said sum, as the venturing of the money is voluntary on my part. Your salary is to be the same as mine in consideration of your joint management, stage managerial duties, and writing of pieces. All publishing and acting rights of our pieces being jointly my property with you, during our management. All money taken at the theatre is to be banked in our joint names, and to be our joint property.' We then began our operations, and the days were taken up in preparing for our venture. One night, while the old Queen's was still in existence, Mr. and Mrs. Byron and myself occupied a private box, and saw the performance. It was a well-conducted, clean little house, but oh, the audience! My heart sank! Some of the occupants of the stalls (the price of admission was, I think, a shilling) were engaged between the acts in devouring oranges (their faces being buried in them), and

drinking ginger-beer. Babies were being rocked to sleep, or smacked to be quiet, which proceeding, in many cases, had an opposite effect! A woman looked up to our box, and seeing us staring aghast, with, I suppose, an expression of horror upon my face, first of all 'took a sight' at us, and then shouted, 'Now, then, you three stuck-up ones, come out o' that, or I'll send this 'ere orange at your 'eds.' Mr. Byron went to the back of the box and laughed until we thought he would be ill. He said my face was a study. 'Oh, Byron!' I exclaimed, 'do you think that people from the West End will ever come into those seats?' 'No,' he replied, 'not *those* seats.' Of course he made jokes the whole evening. One woman in the stalls called out to another, 'I say, Mrs. Grove, 'ere's one for you,' at the same moment throwing a big orange, upon which Mr. Byron remarked, 'Nice woman, Mrs. Grove. *Orange Grove!*' I think, if I could, I would have at that moment retired from my bargain, but the deed was done, and there was no going back from it.

We had possession of the theatre for a month, during which brief time it had to be taken very much to pieces, cleaned, painted, re-seated, re-decorated, furnished, and it was not pleasant to see the money gradually getting less and less, for the bills were paid every week. Mr. James was very kind, and helped me to go about everything as cheaply as possible; and when he came every Saturday with bills to be paid, or sums advanced to the

builder and decorator, the upholsterer, or the gas-fitter, he would say, in his peculiar falsetto voice, 'The poor thousand pounds is becoming smaller by degrees, and beautifully less.' By the time the theatre opened I had about £150 left.

We had an excellent working company—all of whom, of course, in those days had very modest salaries—the most prominent being my old friend Mr. John Clarke, Mr. Dewar (who was the stage-manager), Mr. Montgomery, and Mr. Bancroft (who then had never acted in London, and who from these early days gave me the advantage of his help and counsel), Miss Fanny Josephs, Miss Goodall, Miss Lavine, two of my sisters, and myself.

Agreeing with my wish to re-christen the theatre, which in its long career had borne so many titles, Mr. Byron applied for permission to call it by the name which I myself had chosen. His Royal Highness graciously consented in the terms of the following letter:

'Lord Chamberlain's Office,
St. James's Palace,
February 3, 1865.

'SIR,

'I am desired by the Lord Chamberlain to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th ult., requesting jointly with Miss Marie Wilton, as lessees of the *Queen's Theatre*, in Tottenham Street, that the name of that building may in future be the *Prince of Wales's Theatre;* and I am to inform you, in reply, that his lordship accedes with

pleasure to your request, his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales having signified his consent to the proposed change.

'I am, sir,

'Your obedient servant,

'SPENCER PONSONBY.

'Henry J. Byron, Esq.'

When the speculation was really resolved upon, among the first friends I told of it was one who for years had been so kind to me, and who had shown such interest in my welfare—Lady Harrington. As one, at least, of many letters to me should have a place in this book, I will choose her reference to my important undertaking:

'Richmond Terrace, Whitehall,
February 18, 1865.

'MY DEAR EFFIE,

'I was told of a little paragraph in the newspapers about your having taken a theatre, but not having heard of it from *you*, I did not believe the report. I need scarcely assure you of my sincere good wishes for your success, and I am delighted to hear that you are to have the kind and friendly support of your sister's husband in your undertaking.

'I remember the little *Queen's Theatre* years and years ago, when I resided near Russell Square.

'It is a great card having secured Mr. Byron to yourself; I have just read his clever and entertaining novel with great enjoyment. Since the last week of November, when I saw you at the little

Strand, I have not been to a theatre, except to one morning performance of the Covent Garden pantomime to take my dear grandchildren, as after my attack of bronchitis I am obliged to be very careful about going out in the evening. I shall hope soon to be able to take a peep at you, dear wee manageress, when you are on your throne at your royal domain; till when and ever,

'I am, your very affectionate friend,

'MARIA HARRINGTON.'

Mr. Wooler, a well-known writer of comediettas, sent me a one-act play, entitled, *All's Fair in Love and War*, to read, which I thought just suited for a *lever de rideau*. Mr. Byron and I agreed to accept it, but suggested changing the title, which we thought too long, Byron remarking that 'it would require two play-bills to show it!' Mr. Wooler re-christened his piece *A Winning Hazard;* the strangeness of the coincidence did not at the time strike me, but afterwards, when our success seemed assured, we laughingly remarked that it was, to say the least, a curious incident that the curtain should rise on my venture with those words.

Mr. Wooler was a most eccentric man, and formed strong likes and dislikes, which he was at no pains to disguise. One morning, as he entered the theatre to attend a rehearsal of his little play, he encountered a member of the company towards whom his feelings were the reverse of amiable; as they passed they

saluted one another, and Mr. Wooler gruffly muttered, 'How do you do?' The other responded, 'Quite well, thank you;' upon which Mr. Wooler said, quickly, 'Oh, don't thank me! I don't care how you are; I only asked for form's sake.'

When my little company first met for rehearsals I noticed a changed manner in several of my brother and sister artists. Because I was a manager they appeared to expect that I should be different towards them. I begged them not to think this, and asked for their good wishes and kindly help, assuring them that although I now held the reins, they would find I should never cease to consider them my good friends, and that we should all drive abreast, not one before the other. Throughout the whole of my twenty years' management I hope I kept my word. Well, the opening night was fast approaching, and my work was very hard. Day after day I was in the theatre from ten in the morning until late at night, eating when I could, for I had rehearsals to attend, to direct the dresses for the new burlesque which had been written for the opening, to look after the painters and decorators, and to study my own part; so it may be believed that I had enough to do, and became more and more anxious as the eventful night approached.

When Mr. Byron read his burlesque, a member of the company, who I then met for the first time, was present, and during the reading I observed that about every three or four seconds he distinctly

winked ; after this had been going on for some time I began to feel exceedingly uncomfortable. At last I left the room, and called Byron out ; he saw that I was very much annoyed, and I immediately told him that I was sure Mr. ——'s conduct had been, all through the reading, abominably rude. Byron asked me what he had done. I explained that the actor had done nothing but wink at other members of the company : that I bore it as long as I could, but when he deliberately looked at me and winked *vigorously*, I could stand it no longer. I continued : 'He must not remain in the theatre ! I won't allow him to act ! Give the part to some one else. He is the most impertinent fellow I ever met ! Wherever did he come from ? *Do* send him away, Byron !' Byron went off into a fit of laughter, and then explained to me that it was a nervous affection of the eye, which had, he said, a very funny effect on the stage, in comic parts. I gradually became accustomed to this curious affection, but I shall certainly never forget the first impression it made upon me.

I will here relate a strange incident which occurred on the afternoon of the opening night ; it will interest the superstitious, and amuse the sceptic. My mother, who was almost prostrate with nervousness, would not go to the theatre on the first night ; but my father, I am glad to say, was present. My sister, Mrs. Drake, proposed to take my mother for a country drive to distract her thoughts ; so they went into the neighbourhood of Willesden. My sister talked

about all sorts of things, but to no purpose; she could see that my mother's thoughts were with me in Tottenham Street. At last, failing to secure her attention, Mrs. Drake turned the subject of conversation to me, which seemed to please her. 'Mary has always been fortunate,' my mother said (although I was christened Marie Effie, she loved the name of Mary, and always called me by it); 'but her luck may desert her in this enterprise; she is so venturesome, poor girl! What would I not give to know the end of this undertaking!'

She raised her eyes, and there, on a direction-post, pointing to a lane as they turned a corner in the road, she saw, '*Mary's Place, Fortune Gate.*' It was to my mother like an answer to her wish, and impressed her so much that she afterwards often spoke of it. Curiosity took me to the neighbourhood later on, where I saw and read the kindly and prophetic words, which, I believe, may still be found there. This was only a strange coincidence, but I fancy it is worth the telling.

The hour for launching the little ship arrived; of course there was a great crowd outside the theatre, and the inhabitants of Tottenham Street had, doubtless, never seen such a display of carriages before. The public, who were anxiously waiting for the doors to open, little knew that, but five minutes before they entered, I was standing on a high stool in a private box nailing up the last lace curtain. The house looked very pretty, and, although every-

thing was done inexpensively, had a bright and bonnie appearance, and I felt proud of it. Curtains, carpets, in fact all the appointments, were of the cheapest kind, but in good taste. The stalls were also blue, with white lace antimacassars over them. This was the first time such things had ever been seen in a theatre.

The first programme I offered the public in my new capacity was dated Saturday, April 15, 1865, and comprised *A Winning Hazard*, written by J. P. Wooler, which was acted by Mr. Dyas, Mr. F. Dewar, and Mr. Bancroft: it being his first appearance in London. The ladies engaged in the little piece were Miss L. Hastings and Miss B. Goodall.

After this was played a new and original operatic burlesque extravaganza, entitled *La! Sonnambula! or, the Supper, the Sleeper, and the Merry Swiss Boy.* Being a passage in the life of a famous 'Woman in White;' a passage leading to a tip-top story, told in this instance by Henry J. Byron, who thus described the amusing characters:

THE COUNT RODOLPHO (*Misanthropical, Metaphysical, Metaphorical, Dyspeptic, Bilious, and Disagreeable*) - - - -	Mr. F. DEWAR.
VILLAGE NOTARY (*Marriage Contracts, Paternal Blessings, Title Deeds, Rightful Heirs, and other Stage Requirements, on the shortest notice*)	Mr. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
ALESSIO (*'the Merry Swiss Boy,' Village Barber, and Chatterbox, combining two extreme military ranks, being at once Private Inquirer and General Gossip*) - - - -	Miss MARIE WILTON.
ELVINO (*'the Nice Young Man' of the Village*) -	Miss FANNY JOSEPHS.
A VIRTUOUS PEASANT (*by the kind permission of the Legitimate Drama*) - - -	Mr. HARRY COX.
AN INGENUOUS RUSTIC - - - -	Mr. BROWN.

A SIMPLE-MINDED VILLAGER - - -	Mr. JONES.
A GUILELESS CLODHOPPER - - -	Mr. ROBINSON.
AMINA (*the Village Beauty in her own opinion*) -	Mr. J. CLARKE.
TERESA (*Aunt to Amina—in the Opera she is Amina's Mother, but in the present Drama she arn't*) - - - - - -	Miss LILIAN HASTINGS.
ELVIRA } (*a pretty little pair of Alpine Kids*) -	Miss BLANCHE WILTON.
LISETTA }	Miss AUGUSTA WILTON.
LIZA (*Mistress of the Village Inn, but not of herself, who, having been thrown over by Elvino, naturally feels considerably upset*) - -	Miss BELLA GOODALL.

Peasants and Populace regardless of expense.

The farce of *Vandyke Brown*, in which John Clarke played the principal part, wound up the evening.

I remarked to Mr. Byron, just before the doors were opened, 'I am glad I chose pale blue for the prevailing colour; it looks pretty, don't you think so?' He answered, 'Yes; let us hope we shall not, by-and-by, look pale blue too; *that* wouldn't be pretty.'

When I began to dress I was almost too tired to stand, for I had been all day looking after everything and everybody. However, as the moment approached for my first appearance as a manager, the excitement roused me; and when my cue came, I went on to my own little stage without exhibiting any sign of fatigue. It would be affectation to pretend that I did not know I was already a great favourite with the public, although the warm welcome I received almost overpowered me, but soon added force to my acting.

My first speech was written by Mr. Byron to fit the occasion; it ran thus:

'Well, as I look around I trust I may
Hope this for me may prove a lucky day.
You see I shave, and some say past a doubt,
That I am p'r'aps the smartest shaver out ;
With razors and with soap my living gather—
I go in for the *former* and the *lather*.
I've had some slight experience in the business,
And though the dazzling thought first gave me dizziness,
Friends told me not to be the least faint-hearted,
And so in business for myself I've started.
They said that on my shop there might be *great* runs
When *backed*, or rather *fronted*, by my patrons.
I'll make no promises—they're merest stuff—
The shop itself is promising enough ;
But to the business of the evening warming—
Instead of *promising* commence *performing*.'

Byron came round full of congratulations after my first scene, and, even in the midst of such excitement, could not resist making a joke. When I hurriedly asked him what the audience thought of the appearance of the theatre, he replied, 'Everybody is delighted. Some charming people in the stalls; a very nice Scotch family in the front row. I don't know them, but I'm sure they are Scotch.' 'How?' I asked. 'Because I heard a lady say, "Oh! there's *Aunti Mac-Assar!*"'

After it was all over several well-wishers came round to congratulate me, and while this was going on, the first night's receipts were handed to me. I never before had held so much money in my hands all at once, and what to do with it I did not know. Mr. Byron had just gone home, and had forgotten to give me any directions about it. I dared not take the money home; I felt sure that robbers would

come in and steal it in the night! At length a mutual friend, Mr. Albert Levy, who will well remember the circumstance, volunteered to take charge of it. I gratefully accepted the proposal, and handed him the money, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, which was returned on Monday and banked—the money, not the handkerchief—by Mr. Byron. When I was leaving the theatre to go home, there was a woman with a basket of oranges still standing outside, who, when she saw me, exclaimed, 'Well, if these is your haristocrats, give me the roughs, for I've only took fourpence!'

So commenced my management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre. I have tried to tell *why* I became a manager, and *how*. Let me add that not one shilling further was ever borrowed by me from, or given to me by, anyone living or dead in connection with this enterprise. I was successful in a modest way from the very first, and gradually, but surely, my lucky star led me on to fortune.

An alarming bit of news was given to me some days after the opening of the theatre which had been kept from me at the time, and which very few people knew of. Just before the first performance began, a large bundle of shavings which had not been removed was discovered to be on fire underneath the pit. Happily it was seen in time, and the fire extinguished, or the consequences might have been terrible. The cause of the accident was never found out.

Mr. Wooler, the author of the little opening play, came into the green-room one night to express his delight at the successful start of the theatre; he had been dining out, I fancy, for he appeared to be not quite himself (not an unusual occurrence with poor Mr. Wooler!), and he remarked that he liked everything but the first piece, which he condemned as 'rubbish.' The poor gentleman, having changed the title in a hurry, had forgotten that he was its author, and remarked, 'You should have accepted *All's Fair in Love and War*, a much better play.' After he left I related the little scene to Byron, who was immensely amused: I said, 'Ah, well, he was full of congratulations!' to which Byron replied, 'Full of congratulations! I thought it was liquor!'

I had made a promise to my dear old friend Palgrave Simpson to produce a comic drama of his, called *A Fair Pretender*, which in May commenced the programme, *A Winning Hazard* being acted last, the burlesque still keeping its place.

Mr. Simpson's play was in two acts, and was acted by Mr. Clarke, Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Montgomery, Mrs. Saville, and myself. It was only played until Mr. Byron, true to his word, finished a comedy, which was produced on June 10th; I had a good part to play: at last the long-wished-for chance arrived, and I was happy. The piece was clever and amusing, and a distinct success. It was called *War to the Knife*, and was cast as follows:

MR. HARCOURT	Mr. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
CAPTAIN THISTLETON	Mr. BANCROFT.
JOHN BLUNT	Mr. F. DEWAR.
MR. NUBBLY	Mr. J. CLARKE.
SHARPUS	Mr. TINDALE.
MRS. HARCOURT	Miss FANNY JOSEPHS.
MRS. DELACOUR	Miss MARIE WILTON.
PENSON	Miss LAVINE.
JANE TRIMMER	Miss BLANCHE WILTON.

During the evening I remember Byron coming to me and asking if I would suggest to Mr. Montgomery, who was a very tall man with a long neck, to wear a 'stick-up' instead of a 'turn-down' collar; adding, in his quaint way, 'That neck of his, you know, is such a nuisance; any neck after eight inches becomes monotonous.' I must not omit to say that from the time I opened the theatre, I placed (besides the ten pounds a week I have alluded to) such sums of money as I could spare towards the payment of my debt to Mr. Drake, for I was more than anxious to restore to him what then seemed to me a gigantic sum. I allowed myself very little to live upon, and, as I could afford no luxury in the way of dress, I went into complimentary mourning for economy's sake—a coloured dress was always recognisable, a black one never.

My dressing-room at the Prince of Wales's Theatre was originally close to the stage-door, and I could easily hear all that was going on there. The hall-keeper, who was a most eccentric character named Kirby, and at the same time a very excellent servant, would always carry out his orders in a conscientious manner. The carpenters were often sadly neg-

lectful in wiping their feet as they passed through the hall to the stage, and as there was a huge mat placed for that purpose, Kirby was instructed to insist upon their doing so. He had a habit of singing to himself a great deal, and would often intersperse his dialogue with the words of some favourite song. While dressing one night I overheard the following scraps of conversation, Kirby speaking always in a sleepy, drawling voice:

1ST CARPENTER: 'Cold night, Kirby, ain't it?'

KIRBY: 'Hawful cold' ('*I'm sitting on the stile, Maree*'). 'Wipe your feet.'

2ND CARPENTER: ''Ow are yer, Kirby?'

KIRBY: 'All right, George' ('*Where we sat side by side*'). 'Wipe your feet, George.'

3RD CARPENTER: ''Ave you got change for sixpence, Kirby?'

KIRBY: 'No, I *h*ain't' ('*The night you promised long ago*'). 'Wipe your feet.'

4TH CARPENTER: 'Wet night, Kirby; kind o' weather wot will bring up the vegetables and everythink.'

KIRBY: 'I 'ope it won't bring up my three wives' ('*You said you'd be my bride*'). 'Wipe your feet, 'Arry.'

I have little else to tell of this short opening season, which ended on August 5th. We then all went for a provincial tour—which was fairly successful—with our two principal pieces, *War to the Knife* and *La! Sonnambula!* playing at Liverpool for three

weeks, at Bath and Bristol for a fortnight, and at Exeter for six nights. I look back pleasantly to the happy days passed during that last week at Dawlish, which was all the holiday I could snatch, for directly we returned to town it was to resume work.

NOTE BY MR. BANCROFT.

The story of the opening of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and how its new existence came about, belongs so much more to Mrs. Bancroft than to me, that I need only briefly add my own and individual experiences of early days there.

On the day I went to my first rehearsal of the opening play, I walked from one end of Tottenham Court Road to the other, but could neither find nor hear of any such building as the Prince of Wales's Theatre. At last it struck me that in the neighbourhood the little play-house would still, of course, be better known as the Queen's, if not by its unsavoury nickname, the 'Dust-hole,' which, later on, was more euphoniously called 'Gold-dust Hole.' I had no more difficulty, and reached my destination then quite easily. All was in confusion; the front of the house being still in the hands of its decorators and furnishers, the stage given up to carpenters and the artist for his scenery. However, after I had been warmly welcomed, a part of it was cleared and we got to work: the little play was very simple, and gave no trouble to its interpreters.

On the Friday night after the final rehearsal, I

was taken by John Clarke to a supper-party to Charles Millward's house, where I met for the first time Tom Hood, Jeff Prowse, Arthur Sketchley, John Brough, Henry Leigh, George Grossmith (*père*), Andrew Halliday, Artemus Ward, and one who very soon was to influence my career—Thomas William Robertson. How bright and cheery he was that evening—although his life, at the time, was a hard one.

I was not yet quite twenty-four, and my introduction to these, and other such men, filled me with happiness, and opened, as it were, the doors to a companionship with the lights which then illumined that happy world—Bohemia! It is sad to check the bright thoughts recalled by the names I have mentioned, for as I write there rises the remembrance that the host alone survives; all the others, many of them quite in early manhood, have long since gone to the Shadowed Valley. But what memories of their wit, their charm, their humour, the mere mention of their names, even by so feeble a pen as mine, and even in this hurrying world where to die is so soon to be forgotten, will summon still to those of us who knew them!

During the season I was asked by Miss Lydia Thompson, who was acting then at Drury Lane, if I would play there for her benefit in *My Aunt's Advice*, with Sothern and herself. Of course I was delighted, not only to be of such small service to her, but at the opportunity of showing myself upon

another stage, and in a part in which I had before supported Sothern, and felt at home.

In June I had my first chance in Byron's comedy, *War to the Knife*. I was cast for a sort of man about town—one Captain Thistleton—and to that character I certainly am indebted for the opportunity of gaining some notice from the critics and the public, so adding to the chance of my later efforts being watched.

RESUMED BY MRS. BANCROFT.

Our second season commenced on Monday, September 25th, 1865, when Mr. Hare, and that admirable actress, Miss Larkin, both of whom I had seen and admired in Liverpool, now joined the company and made their first appearances in London. The opening programme comprised *Naval Engagements*, which was played by Mr. J. W. Ray, an excellent actor of old men, and long a prominent member of Mr. Phelps's company at Sadler's Wells; Mr. Dewar, Mr. Montgomery, and Mr. Hare; Miss Larkin, and Miss Fanny Josephs. This was followed by a new burlesque, by Mr. Byron, called *Lucia di Lammermoor; or, the Laird, the Lady, and the Lover:* the characters being amusingly described by him in this way:

HENRY ASHTON (*an* ash-tonishingly *revengeful party, who in depth and bitterness acts up to his character as a Bass-o-profundo*) - - MR. F. DEWAR.

DR. RAYMOND (*his guide, philosopher and friend, tutor to Lucy, physician to the family, accustomed to dog Henry and dog-Latin*) - MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.

EDGAR OF RAVENSWOOD (*an interesting young operatic hero of the regular conventional type, whom Henry attempts to make a butt of, but only succeeds in making a little pale*) -	MISS MARIE WILTON.
NORMAN (*Head Huntsman to Henry*) - -	MR. HARRY COX.
ARTHUR BUCKLAW (*a great swell in his way, and also in Edgar's*) - - - -	MISS FANNY JOSEPHS.
LUCY OF LAMMERMOOR (*Henry's only sister, a simple dove-like creature, given by her own admission to melancholy, and by her brother to Bucklaw*) - - - - -	MR. J. CLARKE.
ALICE (*her confidential maid, who, like all confidential people, speaks her mind pretty freely to everybody*) - - - - -	MISS HUGHES. Her First Appearance at this Theatre.

After which Dion Boucicault's farce, *A Lover by Proxy*, was played, in which Mr. Bancroft took the principal part.

Mr. Hare's subsequent career encourages me to refer further to his *début* as the Landlord Short, in *Naval Engagements*. Mr. Byron, as usual, would drag in a joke, and at rehearsal one day remarked to him, 'So wise to appear first of all in a part suited to you. Short figure, short name, short part; the critics will say, "Mr. Hare, a clever young actor, made his first bow to a London audience, and was most excellent; in Short, perfect."' 'Yes,' said Mr. Hare: 'but what will happen if they don't like me?' 'We'll rechristen the piece "SHORT *Engagements*."' Fortunately for him, and for us, Mr. Hare's subsequent brilliant successes have more than justified my choice of him as a young recruit. Two other funny remarks apropos of this programme I recall. On the first night of the new burlesque, 'little' Clarke, as usual playing the heroine, Lucia, came exultingly into the green-room, and said to the author, 'I had

such a reception! did you hear the cheer?' 'Plainly,' said Byron, '*Lu-cheer!*'

I remember the shouts of laughter provoked by the following nonsense rhymes, which were admirably sung by Mr. Montgomery, as the old pedagogue:

'Tityre tu patulæ requiescat in pace for five form a quorum,
As in præsenti et arma virumque cano, likewise pons asinorum,
Emollet mores nec sinit esse feros,
Et tu Brute ut sunt Divorum;
Oh, populi vox! and also atra nox,
Keemo kimo, et Hi Cockolorum!

At one of the rehearsals of the same piece, Mr. Dewar had to say, 'I give up my claim and waive my title' (retiring with the words up the stage). After remaining there some time, he called out to Byron, 'I'm a long while up here with nothing to say. What am I supposed to be doing?' He was immediately answered, 'My dear fellow, you are *Waiving your Title!*'

It may be a good opportunity to follow up these anecdotes by saying that during my early management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and when it had but recently been so christened, I got into a hansom one evening, and hurriedly directed the cabman to drive to 'The Prince of Wales's.' My thoughts at the time were much occupied by the early production of our first comedy; I was in a nervous state, anxious and worried, hardly noticing the route my cabman took, when suddenly he stopped. I then asked him in an impatient manner why he

did so. 'Didn't you want to be drove to the Prince of Wales's?' I answered, 'Yes.' 'Well,' he said, 'here you are.' The man had pulled up at Marlborough House!

While on the subject of cabmen I think I may tell another incident which happened on a terribly wet night, and when I had been detained at the theatre somewhat late. I ordered a four-wheeled cab, and directed the driver to my home. We had no sooner started than I found that the poor horse could scarcely crawl. The cab was a wretched broken-down thing, and I should not have been surprised if the bottom had come away, leaving me to run with the rest of it, for the man was deaf, and shouts would have been unavailing. The horse was rickety, too, but showed a desire to do his best, poor creature, for he worked his legs in an odd way as if they were being pulled by strings, hoping he was making some progress, but he was not. The man, who was much older than the cab and horse combined, was not only deaf but surely blind, for he took me down strange, narrow, dirty-looking streets and the veriest roundabout way, which made me fear that I should never get home. He did nothing but tug, tug, tug at the veteran horse's toothless mouth, which had no effect, except to send him off into jumping action again. I began to feel very anxious, so I opened one of the windows and called out, 'Man, man!' He took no notice. Then I tried a push with my umbrella; he mumbled some-

thing and went on into another dark, dismal street, of which I had no remembrance. I could not imagine where he was going to take me. Again I opened the window. 'Man, man!' No answer. I was obliged to have recourse to my umbrella once more. He growled out, 'Yes, yes; all right.' I was becoming more and more alarmed. At last I positively hung out of the window, and gave the antique cabman a tremendous push with my umbrella, which nearly sent him sprawling over the horse, shouting at the same time, 'Man, man! Where *are* you driving to? You are going the wrong way, I tell you.' He stopped his old breakdown rattling cab, threw down the reins, turned round on the box-seat and said, 'Look 'ere, miss, I'll get inside and you jump on the box, for you're a worritin' me to death.' I said no more; but when I did reach home I thanked my stars!

One day I hired a hansom to go to South Lambeth. The man drove so quickly that I dared not move; the speed almost took my breath away. We tore along to the amazement and alarm of everyone we passed. When we approached Vauxhall Bridge the astonished toll-man came hurriedly to the gate for his money; but away flew the cab, soon leaving the bewildered man far behind, and cheating the company of their due. I began to be resigned to the fact that the horse, man, cab, and myself would very soon be smashed. The driver was tipsy, and the whole situation was sufficiently

alarming. Presently we neared my destination, and the cabman seemed likely to leave that behind as he did everything else—a very John Gilpin of a Jehu! I hastily pushed my hand through the little trap-door at the top, and cried '*Stop, stop!*' upon which he, to my horror, took hold of my hand, shook it, and said, '*Thank you, miss, I'm better than I was!*' In spite of my terror I could not resist laughing; but my thankfulness when I found myself not only safe, but sound, was indescribable!

I now approach a most important event in my career as a manager. Mr. Byron called upon me one day to tell me that an old friend, Mr. Robertson, wished him to read a comedy of his to me, which had been recently acted with success in Liverpool; he added that the play had been offered in turn to Sothern, Alfred Wigan, and to nearly all the London managers, but they would have nothing to do with it. Mr. Buckstone wrote his opinion that it 'must fail wherever it was produced.' They were chiefly afraid of it, Byron told me, on account of a scene which the journalistic world would take offence at, and the critics would, beyond all doubt, condemn, as it contained sketches of men well known to the author and in 'Bohemia.' Mr. Byron also feared its chance of success himself, but as he had known Tom Robertson, who was at the time in very low water, for many years, he was anxious to do his old friend a good turn; he dwelt

on the danger he saw in the play, and thought that, as young managers, we could not afford to risk offending the critics. I said danger was better than dulness; the next day, Byron read the comedy to me; and, when he had finished it, he expressed himself more and more afraid of it. I at once offered to risk its production; the whole piece seemed to me so clever and original, that I felt sure of its success. Mr. Byron was astonished at my urging our acceptance of the play. At last he agreed that at all events it was worth the trial. This was my first acquaintance with Mr. Robertson, and I cannot describe the charm with which he read his comedy, which further developed the beauties of *Society*, as his new play was called. I remember how he impressed me as being of a highly nervous temperament; he had a great habit of biting his moustache and caressing his beard—indeed, his hands were rarely still; he was at that time thirty-six: somewhat above medium height: rather stoutly built: he had a pale skin and reddish beard, with small piercing red-brown eyes, which were ever restless. The rehearsals advanced, and I liked the play more and more; my views of acting so entirely agreed with Mr. Robertson's that we encountered no difficulties whatever, and everything went smoothly and merrily, although Byron, to the last, dreaded the effect of the 'Owl's Roost' scene. My faith remained unshaken, and acquaintance with the author soon ripened into friendship. Here is an extract

from the play-bill which had so marked an influence on my future theatrical life:

On Saturday, November 11, 1865,

WILL BE ACTED AN ORIGINAL COMEDY CALLED

SOCIETY,

WRITTEN BY T. W. ROBERTSON.

LORD PTARMIGANT - - - -	Mr. HARE.
LORD CLOUDWRAYS, M.P. - - -	Mr. TRAFFORD.
SIDNEY DARYL - - - - -	Mr. BANCROFT.*
MR. JOHN CHODD, SEN. - - -	Mr. J. W. RAY.
MR. JOHN CHODD, JUN. - - -	Mr. JOHN CLARKE.
TOM STYLUS - - - - -	Mr. F. DEWAR.
OLINTHUS O'SULLIVAN, D.C.L. - -	Mr. MONTGOMERY.
DESMOND McUSQUEBAUGH - - -	Mr. HILL.
SAM STUNNER, P.R. (*alias* the 'Smiffel Lamb') -	Mr. TINDALE.
MOSES AARON - - - - -	Mr. BENNETT.
LADY PTARMIGANT - - - -	Miss LARKIN.
MAUD HETHERINGTON - - -	Miss MARIE WILTON.

SYNOPSIS OF THE SCENERY:

Daryl's Chambers in Lincoln's Inn. A Square at the West End.
'The Owl's Roost.' At Lord Ptarmigant's.
Springmead-Le-Beau.

The success of the comedy soon became the talk of the town, for the first time an additional row of stalls was added, and shortly after its production the Prince of Wales honoured the theatre with his first

* As the part I first played in *Society* was a very important one to entrust to so young an actor as I then was, bearing, as it does, much of the burden of the play, I would like to note how much the success I was fortunate enough to achieve was due to the encouragement and support I received from the author, who spared no pains with me, as with others, to have his somewhat novel type of characters understood and acted as he wished. I am sorry to add that my ear for music was deficient, to say the least, and recall, readily, painful struggles to learn, and unwearying kindness on Mrs. Bancroft's part to teach me, my share in the song—which I, at length, accomplished effectively—in the 'Owl's Roost;' really, a reproduction of scenes known to Robertson quite well.—S. B. B.

visit. Perhaps I should say here how the elaborate and careful *dressing* of our plays astonished theatre-goers, and was admitted by the critics to be a revelation; for the reader should be reminded this was the era of much stage slovenliness—Mr. Bancroft and Mr. Hare should be justly remembered as the first reformers on their side. At Christmas, we produced Byron's *Little Don Giovanni*, the hero being the last burlesque character he ever wrote for me, as the success of our management made me firmly determined to insist on my original intention to give up acting that kind of part. The description of the characters will also be found to include the name of Mr. Hare, who, for the only time in his life I suppose, wore petticoats on the stage.

DON PEDRO (*killed in the first scene, and re-wived in the last*) - - - - -	MR. TINDALE.
LITTLE DON GIOVANNI (*a pocket edition of Lover—always in debt, in love, in spirits, and invincible*) - - - -	MISS MARIE WILTON.
LEPORELLO (*his page boy, who, from his chronic nervousness, may be considered even more funkey than flunkey*) - - -	MR. J. CLARKE.
OTTAVIO (*a Tenor, with a cold in his head*) -	MR. H. COLLIER.
MASETTO (*betrothed to Zerlina—pert, perky, pretty, and unprincipled*) - - - -	MISS FANNY JOSEPHS.
AN INSPECTOR OF SPANISH POLICE (*a more than ordinarily 'active,' and a less than usually 'intelligent' officer*) - -	MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
ZERLINA (*a simple peasant girl, borrowed for the occasion from the Domestic Drama*) -	MR. HARE.
DONNA ANNA (*Don Pedro's Daughter—a lady with a high voice, high breeding, and high temper; in fact, the daughter of a hi-dalgo*)	MISS HUGHES.
ELVIRA (*not so young as she might and, under the circumstances, ought to be*) - - -	MISS S. LARKIN.
DOLORES (*bewitching*) - - - -	MISS A. WILTON.
INES (*enticing*) - - - - -	MISS B. WILTON.
TERESITA (*distracting*) - - - -	MISS LOUISA WESTON.

A most amusing scene was introduced, suggested by a party of practical jokers, who, one foggy November night, had scaled the railings of Leicester Square, and painted all sorts of colours the already much dilapidated equestrian figure which then stood in the place of Baron Grant's statue of Shakespeare. The horse in the burlesque was dotted all over with a variety of spots, and looked like an exaggerated Lowther Arcade toy. The scene created great laughter.

During the run of *Don Giovanni*, I received the following amusing note from Mr. Buckstone, who came to see our performance:

'You young scamp! you young Don Giovanni! Don't forget your—your old Don Giovanni. Box for Saturday next, 3rd March. Ever,

'BALVIDINI JUAN BUCKSTONE.'

The burlesque was removed from the bill in the early spring, when I said farewell to that branch of the drama for ever. *Society* was played for a hundred and fifty nights—in those days an extraordinary and seemingly, to us, never-ending run.

On Saturday, May 5th, 1886, was acted, for the first time, *A Hundred Thousand Pounds*, an original comedy, written by H. J. Byron.

GERALD GOODWIN	MR. BANCROFT.
MAJOR BLACKSHAW	MR. F. DEWAR.
SIR RUMSEY WATERS	MR. TINDALE.
MR. CHARKER	MR. TRAFFORD.
MR. FLUKER	MR. HARE.

JOE BARLOW	- Mr. J. W. Ray.
PENNYTHORNE	- Mr. J. Clarke.
PYEFINCH	- Mr. H. W. Montgomery.
MRS. BARLOW	- Miss Larkin.
ALICE BARLOW	- Miss Marie Wilton.
ARABELLA PELL	- Miss Blanche Wilton.
JANE PLOVER	- Miss Goodall.

The first act was so clever and complete, being in fact a play in itself, that the rest seemed weak in comparison. The strength of the opening left little or no chance for the next two acts, but it was a well-written play. After the first scene Byron came into the green-room and asked if he could have something to drink, as the agitation had made his mouth 'horribly dry.' I pointed to the little filter which was always kept on a table, and said, 'That is all there is, Byron.' To which he answered, 'That will do quite well; I will be content with what both peer and peasant alike—*dis*like.'

I must here record another of the author's jokes. During the rehearsals, Mr. Dewar was anxious to know how he could make a distinct change in his appearance. He had worn light wigs and dark wigs, gray wigs and bald wigs; so one morning, after having been in the property-room where a great deal of dust was about, through some alterations that were going on, his face having got besmeared with some of it, he went up to Byron and asked him to advise him about his make-up for the major. 'You see,' said Mr. Dewar, 'I want to make a complete change. Some have advised me to wear reddish hair mixed with gray; but what shall I do with my

face?' Byron looked at him seriously, and said, 'I should wash it.'

It was during the run of this piece that a sad gloom came over my home. My dear mother, who had been ailing for some time, but whose health had not yet caused us real anxiety, as she had never been strong, seemed to become weaker and weaker. She was so afraid of giving me uneasiness in the midst of my work, that she hid her sufferings from me as long as she was able; but it became evident to all of us that she was enduring much pain. We were under engagements at the close of the season, which was rapidly approaching, to take our company to Liverpool and Manchester; but before going, our doctor assured me that my mother's illness was not of an alarming nature, that it was a question of time, and that I was not to be uneasy. This put my heart at rest, and, knowing that she was surrounded by my sisters, who nursed and watched her night and day with loving care, I was able to go away comparatively satisfied.

Before starting, we were told that there was a sort of epidemic at Liverpool; so several of us decided to live at Waterloo, a pretty seaside place a few miles off, where the train could take us every night after the performance was over. We occupied several villas facing the sea, and formed quite a little colony of our own, including Mr. Robertson (who came down for the purpose of finishing and producing his new comedy, *Ours*), Mr. and Mrs. Byron, Mr. and

Mrs. Hare, my sister Augusta, myself, and Mr. Bancroft. We spent a delightful six weeks there. The Liverpool assizes were on at the time, and several barristers whom we knew were there on circuit. Mr. Aspinall, the then Recorder of Liverpool; kindly Mr. (afterwards Sir) John Holker, who had already, by his brilliant talents, earned the position of leader of the Northern Circuit, the familiar members of which body knew him best as 'Sleepy Jack;' Mr. W. R. McConnell, now Revising Barrister of Liverpool; Mr. Leofric Temple, Mr. Walter Bacon, and Mr. W. S. Gilbert, then a briefless barrister. We often made up a party to go to St. George's Hall to hear cases in which some of them were concerned, and I hope my friend Mr. Gilbert will forgive my telling a little story against him which occurred on the day he was going to make his maiden speech in prosecuting an old Irishwoman for stealing a coat.

He was very anxious about his first essay, and we all assembled to hear it. Mr. Gilbert tried for a long time to speak, but the old woman interrupted him so persistently that he could not get a word in edgeways, with such polite remarks as, 'Hold your tongue!' 'Shut up, yer spalpeen!' 'Ah, if ye love me, sit down!' 'It's a lie, yer honour!' 'Hooroo for ould Ireland!' etc. She jumped about and made such a noise every time Mr. Gilbert attempted to speak, that the Judge ordered her to be taken down until the next day; and as she left the dock, the prisoner made a grimace at Mr. Gilbert, which I will

not attempt to describe! So, after all, the maiden speech never came off, and I fear we were all immensely amused at Mr. Gilbert's discomfiture. A little later on we were told that Mr. Bacon had received his first brief; the case was to be heard at once, and he had hardly a moment to read it. We rushed off to the court in order not to miss it, and were waiting anxiously, when, by-and-by, a mutual friend came to us to say that Mr. Bacon on opening the brief found it to be a *pig* case, and no one could induce him to have anything to do with it, so he had handed it over to some one else.

Poor Mr. Bacon (or 'Streaky,' as he was called by his companions) was a victim to chaff for a long time afterwards. Our legal friends came down to Waterloo once every week, and the evenings were dedicated to entertainments improvised by ourselves. We had several mock trials in which Mr. Hare was always condemned to the ignominous position of representing the criminal in the dock. It was interesting to hear the clever speeches, all about nothing, delivered by these rising young barristers. I was sometimes the Judge, and gave imitations of the various gentlemen I had seen on the Bench. My robe was a pink wrapper, and my wig made of cotton-wool. On one occasion, for variety, we got up a mock opera, in which I was the *prima donna*, Mr. Gilbert the lover, Mr. Hare his rival, with large cloak, broad-brimmed hat, and knives and daggers all over him; Mr. McConnell was the *prima donna's*

father, whom he made a deaf old man, so that we were obliged to shout all our recitatives at him through an improvised ear-trumpet. The opera was sung throughout in Italian gibberish, and was a most amusing bit of foolery.

Our audiences were small but appreciative, for they included both Mr. Byron and Mr. Robertson; I never saw them laugh so much in my life. We were all young then, and the fun, perhaps, appeared greater than it would now, but it was a very happy time. Some of those pleasant friends are gone, alas! never to return.

Robertson, having completed his new comedy, read, rehearsed, and produced it in Liverpool. These early performances were very valuable to the ultimate fate of the work, enabling the author to considerably improve the end of the play, before we submitted it to the verdict of a London audience, when I shall refer to its production at greater length.

From time to time I received letters from my mother, written by one of my sisters and only signed by herself; though still very ailing she was cheerful, and counting the days for my return. These letters made me feel contented and happy, but I longed to be near her again. Towards the end of our tour, while we were acting at Manchester, and when I was looking forward to soon going home, one morning (shall I ever forget it?) I received a letter from an old and valued friend of my family, Mr. T. W. Erle, who had undertaken the sad duty of revealing to

me the true and fatal nature of my mother's illness. It had been thought prudent to disguise the facts from me as long as possible, but he felt that it would be wrong to keep me in ignorance of the truth any longer, and therefore, as gently and tenderly as he could, he broke the miserable news to me.

My darling, patient mother was fading gradually away from us, and in a short time would leave a blank which could never be filled up. There is not a grateful, loving daughter in the world who will not realize what my feelings were as I read this wretched letter, for her loss meant much to me. My sisters' task was a painful one, for not only had they watched her day and night, but were told to be cheerful in my mother's presence, and not to let her think her malady a fatal one, as suspicion of the truth would hurry on the end. When I reached home I saw the terrible change. Death was coming nearer and nearer, and seemed to chill the house, which already felt empty.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEASON OF 1866-67.

THE early part of this season was a true picture of life as we often find it—gloom and gaiety being strangely intertwined. At the theatre all was bright and successful; away from it everything was wretched.

With rehearsals for the production of *Ours*, and of a new burlesque to be played soon after in conjunction with it (for which I had been so fortunate as to retain Miss Lydia Thompson's services to fill the place I formerly occupied), and my mother's unhappy illness, my mind and heart had much to do. How I got through my nightly work at the theatre, together with my increasing responsibilities of management, I know not. All that could be done to soften the remaining days of my mother's life was done by devoted children, whose unceasing attention helped to alleviate her sufferings. My anxieties were also greatly increased by Mr. Byron having unfortunately, as it turned out, during our recent engagement at Liverpool, become entangled in the management of

the theatres there, which took him much from London and laid an unfair strain of work and responsibility upon me: although, I am glad to say, without destruction to our friendship.

The theatre was re-opened in September, when Robertson's new comedy was acted for the first time in London. It was announced as follows:

On Saturday, September 15, 1866, *will be acted*

OURS:

An Original Comedy, by T. W. Robertson, Author of 'Society.'

ACT I.—The Park: Autumn.
ACT II.—The Drawing-room: Spring.
ACT III.—The Hut: Winter.

Period—Before and during the Crimean War.

PRINCE PEROVSKY	MR. HARE.
COLONEL SIR ALEXANDER SHENDRYN	MR. J. W. RAY.
ANGUS MACALISTER	MR. BANCROFT.
HUGH CHALCOT	MR. J. CLARKE.
CAPTAIN SAMPREY	MR. TRAFFORD.
SERGEANT JONES	MR. F. YOUNGE.
HOUGHTON	MR. TINDALE.
LADY SHENDRYN	MISS LARKIN.
BLANCHE HAYE	MISS LOUISA MOORE.
MARY NETLEY	MISS MARIE WILTON.

(The cast of the comedy was the same as in the previous August at Liverpool, with the exception of the part of Sergeant Jones, which had been acted there by Mr. Dewar.)

The success of the play was immediate and remarkable, and did much to decide the ultimate fortunes of the theatre and the fame of its author. The effect of the second act, where the troops leave for the Crimea, on the first night's audience was

extraordinary, the same enthusiasm being kept up nightly for a very long time. While in the Crimean hut great surprise was caused by the realistic effect of the driving snow each time the door was opened.

Lydia Thompson appeared in a new burlesque by Mr. Byron on the subject of *Der Freischütz*, which was played, on October 10th, in conjunction with *Ours;* but it showed a distinct falling off in the writing, partly owing, perhaps, to his 'losing heart,' as he expressed it, through my refusal to act in it, but very much to divided interests caused by his Liverpool speculations; the burlesque was only moderately successful, although well acted, the principal parts being taken by Mr. Clarke, Mr. Montgomery, Mr. F. Glover, and Mr. F. Younge; Miss Lydia Thompson, who made a decided success, Miss Maitland, and Miss Louisa Moore. Fortunately the great popularity of the comedy excused the weakness of the after-piece.

I must now ask the reader to bear with me while I return to the sad subject of my mother's illness. It was evident that she was gradually fading from us. In addition to the constant care of our own family doctor, she was attended by Sir William Fergusson and by Dr. Lee, of Savile Row; but her malady had been taking root for years, and no earthly help could rescue her. The time arrived when it was considered imperative for her to be made aware of her real state. It was a terrible day for us all. She bore her sentence with quiet resig-

nation, and, when we entered the room, she smiled sadly, and said, 'I have received my death-warrant; but I implore you not to give way to grief: be brave, and help me to meet the end.'

One day, soon after, she and I were alone; I was seated on a stool at her feet, and in her half-delirium her mind wandered back to the past, and recalled the time when I was but a child. 'Working so hard,' she murmured with her eyes closed, and this recollection seemed to pain her.

During the last act of *Ours*, Mr. Clarke, who then played Hugh Chalcot, had to say, 'What a charming girl! how interesting! no father, no mother.' The speech had always given me a pang, but on one particular night, when he came to the words 'no mother,' a cold shudder came over me, and I became faint. Directly the comedy was over, I hurried to the sick-bed, with a horrible dread upon me. My sister, Mrs. Fletcher, met me at the door to prepare me for a great change, and to tell me that the end was near. My father and my sisters were all with her, and my mother looked at me as if to say, 'I have waited for you.' The hour came to bid an eternal farewell: but those moments of supreme grief are too sacred to record. How lonely and desolate I felt! I had lost that best of friends, from whose love I often sought and surely found true sympathy. How I wish that she had been spared to share the good fortune she predicted for me. The modest comfort she enjoyed might have in-

creased to some luxury in her old age (for she was still young when she died). It would have been such a happiness to all her children.

My mother had always a great horror, which I inherit, of being buried in the earth, and my next and last duty was (although I could as yet but ill afford the cost) to build a tomb in Norwood Cemetery, where her children could from time to time take flowers to her.

On the evening following my mother's death, a strange incident was related. The night fireman at the theatre, whose name was Hotine, was a most excellent servant, who had been strongly recommended to us for his post by Captain Shaw. He knew that my mother was ill, but was not aware of any grave cause for anxiety, and did not know of her death until he was informed on his arrival at his post on the following night, and heard that Miss Lydia Thompson, to whose kindness I was indebted for replacing me in *Ours* for a time, was going to appear in my place. Hotine went straight upstairs to my wardrobe-mistress and anxiously asked her if she knew at what time my mother died. She could not say, as no one had yet heard any particulars. She asked him why he wanted to know, and he related the following curious circumstance: 'I said "Good-night," as usual, to the young missus, who often says a few kind words before she goes home, and I assured her that all was right and safe; I went round again when the performance was over to

make sure, as I always do, you know, after everybody is gone. It was just one o'clock as I sat down to my work' (the man filled up his time by making shoes and boots for his children) 'in the little green-room, with the door leading on to the stage wide open. The clock struck *two*, and then *three*, when a loud crash, just as if a portion of the roof had fallen in, made me jump to my feet; I thought that at least the sunlight chandelier in the ceiling had fallen into the stalls, so I took up my lantern, and went quickly on to the stage to see what had happened. I found everything was just as I had left it. I went all round the theatre, but there was not a thing disturbed.' Hotine seemed scared and frightened, and begged to know the hour of my mother's death. When Mr. Bancroft arrived at the theatre he learnt from him the particulars. My mother died at three o'clock on the morning of November 30th.

For Christmas, Byron wrote the last burlesque that was produced at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. It was a very poor work, compared with what he had done before, which was all the more regrettable, as it was the means of introducing Miss Henrietta Hodson, who made a most successful first appearance in London, and who, like myself, hailed from Bristol. Its title was *Pandora's Box; or, the Young Spark and the Old Flame;* but candour compels the admission that it never burnt brightly, and, indeed, hurt the receipts of the theatre instead of improving them.

Byron was now nearly always in Liverpool, where he had taken a house, and we rarely met. From the correspondence between him and myself, in which he first suggested that he should retire altogether from the partnership, I will make a few extracts with a view to place the reader *en rapport* with the position of affairs at this time. These extracts will at least have interest for our many mutual friends.

Mr. Byron's letters are dated from 21, Huskisson Street, Liverpool; mine from London.

From Mr. Byron to Me.

'*February* 6, 1867.

'It will be better for us both to cease our joint management at the end of our two years, and I shall willingly dissolve partnership, if you wish it, on the 15th April. I consider that by refusing to play in burlesque you have done me an irreparable wrong, and yourself considerable harm; however, I have met your views always, and it is no doubt too late for me to repeat what I have so often said, and what is the general opinion of the public.

* * * * *

'I shall be in town to-morrow, or Friday, and will telegraph. There will be no occasion to answer this letter, as I shall see you in all probability before return post.'

From Mr. Byron to Me (*a telegram*).

'*February* 7, 1867.

'I am unfortunately prevented by business here from going to London.'

From Me to Mr. Byron.

'*February* 7, 1867.

'I am sorry you are not coming up. Your letter is too long and important to answer easily, and the matters it involves could be so much better settled if we had met at once to talk them over; as, however, you have postponed your visit, I shall answer your letter candidly.

'You tell me that "by refusing to play in burlesque" I have done you an "irreparable wrong." I don't acknowledge anything of the kind. All my acting in either *Der Freischütz* or *Pandora* would have done very little good for them, beyond saving my substitute's salary. I can't help it if my candour wounds you, my dear Byron, but neither of the pieces has been worthy of you—I don't tell you half what I hear said against them—and both burlesques were very much neglected by you at rehearsal. I feel convinced that *Pandora* only wanted your presence to find out its weak points, and want of incident, in order to have made it at least a tolerable success.

'You have often upbraided me with the sacrifices you have made in writing only for one theatre; I admit that your literary reputation would naturally suffer, but it has been a very great commercial gain. You have written five burlesques and two comedies, for which you will have received, by April next, a thousand pounds in salary and half of the entire

profits. You must also remember that when we started you risked nothing—I risked all. You even made me sign a paper to indemnify you from any share in whatever loss I might suffer; and for the money I borrowed I have been paying a high interest, not a penny of which have I claimed from the treasury.

'You must remember, too, Byron, that when you took the Liverpool theatres I never murmured, nor even opposed you, although I felt it must prove a fatal blow to my interests; now tell me, frankly, if any other partner would have done this? It is impossible for me not to see that all your energies are now in Liverpool, and if we dissolve partnership at Easter, and I carry on the theatre without you, I don't think my conduct during our two years' business connection will cause you to entertain a single unfriendly feeling towards me.

'You must know well enough that I have no personal wish to separate from you: indeed, I should be only too glad if we could go on together as we did the first two seasons; but what a partnership becomes under present circumstances, with you and all your energies centred in Liverpool, I leave you to candidly think about.'

From Mr. Byron to Me.

'*February* 8, 1867.

'Much in your letter is very right and very true. Let me, however, correct *one* mistake about the risk.

You certainly risked a thousand pounds, and I stipulated that in case of its loss *you* would have no claim on *me;* but in all business transactions at the theatre during our joint management, I have stood precisely the same risk as you. I told you frankly about the *original* risk when you applied to me to join you.

* * * * *

'Your conduct in the matter of my taking these theatres was truly admirable, and was fully appreciated by me, so much so that you will remember I said at the time I should not consent—on a renewal of our management after two years—to take *half* the profits as my share, considering my frequent absence and divided duty. This I strongly impressed on you at Waterloo, and if we had remained in partnership, I should have insisted on your receiving the lion's share of the reward. Had my name been associated on the bills, etc., with the management, it would have been different; but as it has always been my aim to award the managerial position to you, as I have never made any engagement or arrangement except at your wish, as you have always superintended the dressing of pieces, they have also been cast as you wished, and as the real management of the theatre has devolved on you, I could not see how my being a great deal away could materially affect you.'

My letter in reply was, in substance, an urgent request to Mr. Byron to 'come up to town at once,

that some final result should be immediately arrived at.'

The result was that our partnership—I rejoice to add, not our friendship—ended on April 15th, two years after its commencement. One further sentence of a letter in corroboration of a previous statement of mine will perhaps suffice.

From Mr. Byron to Me.

'*April* 10, 1867.

'Our letter of agreement is in my desk in London. It settled you were to receive ten pounds weekly until the end of the second year, thus making the thousand pounds you advanced. This you have done with the exception of one week. If you will draw all the money banked in our joint names out of the bank, after paying yourself the extra ten pounds, you can send me my share of it. I waive all right to half the value of the property in the theatre in consideration of your taking any outstanding debts on your own shoulders.

'Mrs. Byron sends you her kind love. God bless you.'

Subsequently Mr. James, who was still the lessee of the theatre, became a partner, without advancing money, in its fortunes for a few years, which will be further referred to. With Mr. James our relations were throughout of the pleasantest kind.

Ours was acted for a hundred and fifty nights on

its first production, its author meanwhile being engaged on a new comedy to succeed it, and which he called *Caste*. I vividly recall the effect he produced by his exquisite reading of his work to the little band of players who had the delightful task of first acting it, for I don't know of such cleverly drawn and powerfully contrasted parts in any other modern play. The rehearsals were a labour of love. My old Strand comrade, George Honey, was chosen for the boldly painted character of Eccles, and to that charming actress, Lydia Foote, was entrusted the beautiful part of his daughter Esther. Mr. Hare had the opportunity of wonderful contrast in descending from the old Russian Prince to the splendid type of the real working man, Sam Gerridge. Miss Larkin brought all her art to bear on the part of the proud old mother, whose son poor Fred Younge, we all believed, at last thought himself to really be, so earnestly did he live in the joys and sorrows of George D'Alroy. Mr. Bancroft had a striking character after his own heart. As for myself, I fairly revelled in the high spirits of Polly Eccles, and may mention that the expedient in the last act of breaking the news to Esther that her husband was not dead, by means of a mock ballet, grew from our impromptu entertainments at Waterloo of the previous summer, to which I alluded in the foregoing chapter.

I will now give an extract from the play-bill which records the production :

On Saturday, April 6, 1867, will be acted, for the first time,

CASTE:

AN ORIGINAL COMEDY, WRITTEN BY T. W. ROBERTSON,
The Author of 'Society' and 'Ours.'

Characters:

HON. GEORGE D'ALROY	MR. FREDERICK YOUNGE.
CAPTAIN HAWTREE	MR. BANCROFT.
ECCLES	MR. GEORGE HONEY.
SAM GERRIDGE	MR. HARE.
MARQUISE DE SAINT-MAUR	MISS LARKIN.
ESTHER ECCLES	MISS LYDIA FOOTE.
POLLY ECCLES	MISS MARIE WILTON.

ACT I.—The Little House in Stangate: Courtship.
ACT II.—The Lodgings in Mayfair: Matrimony.
ACT III.—The Little House in Stangate: Widowhood.

The success of *Caste* passed my wildest dreams, and formed the attraction of the evening, being simply preceded by a farce.

This comedy is especially endeared to me by the dedication: 'To Miss Marie Wilton (Mrs. Bancroft) this Comedy is Dedicated by her Grateful Friend and Fellow-Labourer, the Author.'

I can well remember during the first run of *Caste* one of the rare occasions on which I was tempted to laugh on the stage in a serious situation. I think when I relate the story I shall be forgiven. Mr. Hare, always a most earnest and conscientious actor, must also plead guilty with me. It happened in the last act; Mr. Younge, who was playing George D'Alroy, had a long wait, and the weather being very hot, he was in the habit of taking off his wig and going into the green-room for a chat until he was called for the stage. On this particular night a

member of the company played the unpardonable practical joke of hiding the wig, and left the theatre, forgetting having done so—a mistake deeply regretted afterwards, for this joke was merely intended to cause a temporary confusion. It will be remembered by those who know the play that George D'Alroy is supposed to have been killed in the Indian Mutiny, for which campaign he departs at the end of the second act, where an affecting parting takes place between himself and his young wife. In the last act we are all back at the poor little house in Stangate in mourning, and in deep sorrow for his death. In the scene where Polly Eccles is preparing tea for Captain Hawtree and Sam Gerridge, they are all seated at the table, Polly complaining that the milkman is very late. George D'Alroy, who has marvellously escaped death in the mutiny, and has hurried home, arriving in fact before the news of his safety, has seen the milkman outside, and takes the small can from him, brings it in, and comes to the table unseen by any of them, expecting a warm welcome. Polly is in the act of putting the cup to her lips, when she raises her eyes slowly and sees George. She stares at him, thinking he is the ghost of her dead brother-in-law, slowly puts down the cup, keeping her eyes still fixed with terror upon him, and gradually disappears under the table. Sam Gerridge is eating his thick slice of bread-and-butter, quite oblivious of what is going on until he sees Polly go under the

table. He looks up with surprise, and, seeking the cause of this strange proceeding, fixes his eyes on George, who is still standing with the milk-can in his hand, and, terrified, follows Polly with a dive under the same table. Captain Hawtree notices this strange conduct, and turns his chair round to ascertain what they have both been staring at. He is equally astonished to see his dead friend come to life, but does not express his amazement in the same fashion, remaining in his chair transfixed. All this is done in silence, not a word being uttered. That is the situation. Well, on the night the wig was missing, every search was made by the dressers, and nowhere could it be found. There was nothing to be done by Mr. Younge but to go on without it. His hat was, of course, made to fit over the wig, and his own hair being cut short, the hat, when on, came so low down that it almost covered his ears, and had somewhat the appearance of an extinguisher. The effect this appearance had upon us can be imagined. On looking up, I saw only a part of his face, hidden under the huge pot-hat, and no ears! It was so sudden and unexpected, that instead of a look of terror on my face, there was nothing but a convulsive effort to suppress laughter. Mr. Younge muttered under his breath, 'For mercy's sake, don't laugh!' I had no sooner disappeared under the table, than I heard Mr. Hare give a kind of grunt, which told me how the strange appearance had affected him, and he and I were under the table

exhausted with laughter. Mr. Younge only added to the absurdity of the situation by looking exceedingly angry at such a trick being played upon him; his agitation, serious expression, and, above all, his desperate earnestness in begging us not to laugh, with his head buried in a hat which almost came down to his neck, holding the milk-can out for me to take—a situation which was always a most impressive and interesting one—at this particular moment became to us painfully comic. My efforts to suppress my laughter made me positively ill. When Mr. Hare and I emerged from under the table to see if George D'Alroy were really a ghost or absolute flesh and blood, the moment we faced him we were again convulsed with laughter, for he had removed the extinguisher, and showed his own close-cut dark hair of convict type in place of the flaxen wig. In the business of the scene I had to go off into hysterics when I ascertained for a fact that George was really alive. This was lucky for me, for it helped me to give vent to my laughter. But poor Mr. Hare, whose mouth was full of bread-and-butter, had no such safety-valve, and almost choked. At last we got through the play, and I returned to my dressing-room perfectly exhausted. I believe Mr. Younge never forgave the trick that was played upon him.

Miss Thompson's engagement ended, unhappily, in a dispute, which had to be settled at Westminster, where the Law Courts then were. Lord Chief

Justice Bovill, I remember, presided. Mr. (since Sir John, and now Baron) Huddleston fought for my opponent, while our old friend, the late Mr. Serjeant Ballantine, represented our views of the case. The question at issue was of considerable moment to the theatrical world, and during the trial the court was very crowded. While I was giving my evidence I recall quite distinctly the fact of Mr. Bancroft, who occupied a prominent position in the front of the little gallery, enlivening the proceedings by dropping his walking-stick in dangerous proximity to the heads of the junior bar. The case ended in a trivial verdict; inferring, I presume, that plaintiff and defendant were both in the right and both in the wrong. I am afraid I regarded 'the law' as a thing 'fearfully and wonderfully made,' and inclined, very often, to the opinion expressed on the subject by the immortal Mr. Bumble.

In the case of Lydia Thompson and myself the saying, 'It is astonishing how much better I like a man after I have fought with him,' was very true, for we have been the best of friends ever since.

On the evening after the trial it so chanced that we met Mr. Huddleston, who was then known as the 'buck of the bar,' at a party, when our opponent of the previous day had to take me in to dinner, and I had the great pleasure to commence a friendship which my husband and I have enjoyed ever since, and to which, later in these pages, we trust to have the privilege of further alluding.

NOTES BY MR. BANCROFT.

I have but a few paragraphs to add to Mrs. Bancroft's history of this season. I recall an incident which befell John Clarke during the run of *Ours*, owing to the removal for a short while from the time-tables of the long-standing five o'clock train from Brighton, where Clarke had gone from Sunday morning to the Monday afternoon; during which he learnt by accident, while shopping with his host or hostess (who will well remember the incident), that the five o'clock train, to catch which he was then on his way to the station, had been taken off. Horror-stricken at the discovery—as it must be remembered that plays began much earlier in those days, for we had not yet introduced the luxurious eight and half-past eight commencement, and the curtain rose to *Ours* shortly after seven, the comedy being acted in conjunction with a burlesque. Clarke was driven to the station at a furious pace to find the news confirmed. There was then no other train for hours, and no possibility of reaching town except by a special. This was quickly ordered, and he was shot, with his luggage, into the solitary compartment, and arrived at Victoria shaken to a jelly. Then, thanks to a rapid hansom, he dashed up the stairs of the theatre to his dressing-room, just in time to relieve our anxiety and to do his work, for which all sorts of impromptu arrangements were being considered; for he counted on arriving, as he did, just in time, and had not telegraphed news of

his adventure. While scrambling into his clothes, he gasped out a request to me to send down some money to the cabman; and I can recall his indignation now, as he told me the story, at having, after paying for the special train, to take a ticket to London, as his own return half was only valid by an ordinary train.

I remember also, at about the same time, feeling an addition to my importance, when I gave my first 'man's dinner-party.' Among the guests who then honoured their young host I know were Sothern, Boucicault, and Tom Hood. Dining soon afterwards at Sothern's charming old house in Wright's Lane, Kensington, I sat next to a man whose appearance faintly suggested my make-up as Hawtree; this happened during the early rehearsals of *Caste*. All that had been said on the subject by the author when he read his comedy, by way of describing George D'Alroy and his friend Captain Hawtree, was that he wished one of them to be fair, and the other dark.

Fred Younge was amazed when I went to him and asked if he would mind being the fair man. He said how on earth could he do such a thing! He was the sentimental hero, and of course was intended to be dark; while, as what he described as the comic dandy or fop, I was equally compelled to be fair, and wear long flaxen whiskers. I eventually succeeded in touching a very pardonable vanity—his only drawback to his ever-to-be-remembered performance

being that he had already partly lost his *première jeunesse*—by suggesting that a chestnut-coloured wig would give him youth. At any rate I got my way ; but I believe, at the time, I was by more than one person thought to be mad for venturing to clothe what was supposed to be, more or less, a comic part in the quietest of fashionable clothes, and to appear as a pale-faced man with short, straight black hair. The outline of the plot and portions of the dialogue of *Caste* may be found in a contribution by Robertson to a Christmas volume edited by Tom Hood, which was called *Rates and Taxes*, and published at Christmas, 1866; and apropos of a play and part to which I owe so much, had I at the time read the story on which he built up his *chef d'œuvre*, I should certainly have begged Robertson to have retained the incident of the loss of an arm which is the case with the equivalent to Hawtree, as I think I could have turned it to good account in the last act. It was in *Caste* that we made a distinct stride towards realistic scenery. The rooms, for the first time, had ceilings, while such details as locks to doors, and similar matters, had never before been seen upon the stage.

On 'the Hill' at Epsom this year, memorable in racing circles through the snow-storm in which Hermit won the Derby, I was first introduced to Edmund Yates, whose friendship for now full twenty years I have enjoyed, with no remembrance of a rough word having ever imperilled it.

I wonder if he remembers who presented me to him, or if he recollects my asking him later on what he expected the mutual acquaintance in question, who might not have really known his face and form until 'Ape' immortalized them in one of his marvellous drawings for *Vanity Fair*, would think of the caricature. Yates's reply to my question was in these words: 'Well, my dear B., if you want my opinion, I should say he would tell everybody he thought it delightful; but when he got home would lock the door, and rub his head in the hearthrug!'

Caste went bravely on, and its great success firmly established the little theatre in public regard. The run was by no means exhausted when the season ended in July, to allow the fulfilment of engagements to play it for four weeks at the Alexandra Theatre Liverpool, which was then under Mr. Byron's management, and also for a month at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester. The play was received at both cities with extraordinary enthusiasm.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEASON OF 1867-68.

COMMENCED BY MR. BANCROFT.

THE successful career of *Caste* was resumed on Saturday, September 28th, and on November 4th a clever little farce—one of the earliest works of its since distinguished author, to whom playgoers have been so greatly indebted, W. S. Gilbert—called *Allow Me to Explain*, was produced and played as an after-piece to the comedy, George Honey and myself taking the principal characters. A comedy named *How She Loves Him*, written by Dion Boucicault, and which had been originally acted in America, was under consideration for some little time, and finally fixed upon to succeed *Caste*, Robertson cordially agreeing with our effort to avoid offering the public *toujours perdrix*, and being anxious to be relieved from the responsibility of continually providing the programme. This arrangement was all the more welcome to him at this time, as he was on the eve of going to Frankfort to be married to Miss Feist, a handsome German girl, who was his second wife.

A letter from Boucicault, who had his play in two forms—a three-act and a five-act version—is interesting after this long lapse of time:

'326, Regent Street, W. (Langham Place),
November 10, 1867.

'MY DEAR MARIE,

'Shall I tell you what you said when you read the piece? "Oh dear! this is not what I expected; I don't see this at all!"

'Now show me how good you think me by saying outright what you think, and don't offend me by "doing the nice," and by imagining that you can ever wound my vanity.

'The piece you have *is* the old piece cut into three instead of into five acts, with two scenes *added* to bind the first and second acts into one, and the fourth and fifth into one; the second being the old third. There! you see I will not allow you any escape! The comedy is one of "character and conversation," sketchy and slight. It does not "smack" on your palate, and you are disappointed sadly. There, there! pout it out! Push the glasses away, and say, "Give me something else," and don't dare to imagine that I shall be the less

'Sincerely yours,

'DION BOUCICAULT.'

It was eventually settled that the comedy should be produced in its five-act form, and the rehearsals of it were soon commenced under the direction of the author. H. J. Montague—a young actor of

great personal charm, who, we felt sure, had every chance of growing into public favour—was engaged, and also Mr. Blakeley, known well by both of us in Liverpool, and who in this play made his first London appearance. Boucicault's accomplished power as a stage-manager is too well known to need our praise, and it was a lesson to young managers to sit under him. Sometimes, however, he would change a fragment of the stage business, previously arranged, for the worse—not perhaps an altogether unknown weakness with dramatic authors; there was, we thought, a distinct instance of this at the end of the first act of *How She Loves Him*, which at last got very muddled. An idea struck one of us which was a distinct improvement on what had been rehearsed, but we hardly, in those days, liked to interfere with such an autocrat, kind as we had always found him. We are sure our old friend will forgive the disclosure of the stratagem by which we brought about the wished-for alteration, which for a long time we could not see our way to. At last it was done by attributing the notion to himself, and one he had, as we ventured to think, at a previous rehearsal, discarded too hastily. Whether he saw through our trick or not, he never divulged; but he rewarded the shrewdness by adopting the suggestion.

While these rehearsals were in progress, it was my lot to see, on the night of December 6th, 1867, the burning of Her Majesty's Theatre. I was on my

way to have supper in the coffee-room of the Café de l'Europe, which was then partitioned off into the old-fashioned 'boxes,' and much frequented by old Mr. Keeley, Buckstone, Walter Montgomery, Sothern, Kendal (then a young Haymarket recruit), Walter Lacy, and other kindred souls. I stood among the enormous crowd in the Haymarket, rooted to the spot by the hideous fascination of the flames, which quickly enough worked their will. This was the fiercest fire I ever saw, and nothing could be done beyond saving the adjoining buildings. Thus the old home of Jenny Lind, of Malibran, of Grisi, and of Titiens, became, as they now are, a memory.

Although *Caste* would surely have drawn good houses for a much longer time, we continued the principle we had already begun of making a *répertoire* to fall back upon, and withdrew the play on Friday, December 20th, after a hundred and fifty-six performances—a number which seems of little moment now, but in those days bespoke exceptional success—and on the following evening the new programme met with a somewhat stormy reception.

On Saturday, December 21, 1867, *will be produced*

A MODERN COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS, ENTITLED

HOW SHE LOVES HIM,

Written by Dion Boucicault,

The Author of 'London Assurance,' 'Old Heads and Young Hearts,' etc., etc.

SIR ABEL HOTSPUR, H.E.I.C.S. (*an Invalid*)	MR. W. BLAKELEY.
BEECHER SPRAWLEY - - - -	MR. BANCROFT.
MR. NETTLETOP (*divorced from his Wife*)	- MR. HARE.
DICK HEARTLEY (*in love with Atalanta*)	- MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.

DOODY (*Attendant on Sir Abel*)	MR. J. P. REYNOLDS.
SIR JERICHO MAXIMUM, M.D.	MR. E. DYAS.
DR. MINIMUM (*a Homœopathic Doctor*)	MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
DR. AQUARIUS ZKWERTZ (*a Hydropathic Doctor*)	MR. TINDALE.
SPARKS (*an Electropathic Practitioner*)	MR. TRAFFORD.
TUCKER (*a Servant*)	MR. HILL.
LADY SELINA RAFFLETICKET (*a Woman about Town*)	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.
MRS. NETTLETOP	MISS LYDIA FOOTE.
MISS ATALANTA CRUISER	MISS MARIE WILTON.
BOBBY (*a Maid of all work*)	MISS GEORGE.

The Scene passes during the first Four Acts at Snuggleton-Super-Mare, a Fashionable Seaside Watering Place; during the Fifth, at Putney.

Nothing could have been more cordial than the applause which greeted the first and second acts, and the good news was sent to the author to the Princess's Theatre, where he was acting at the time. An immensely amusing scene in the next act between a patient and doctors of every opposite belief—allopathic, homœopathic, hydropathic, and galvanic—was received with hearty laughter. Unfortunately a situation at the end of it, about which Boucicault had been very obstinate during the rehearsals, went all wrong, and the rest of the play was not allowed to redeem the mistake. It was a great pity, for, as may well be thought, no comedy by Boucicault could fail to contain great characterization and charm of writing—much in this being equal to his best, being, in fact, described as 'worthy of Congreve and Douglas Jerrold.'

Individually, the failure of the play was a great loss to me, as, personally, I was fortunate enough to make a hit in a part which otherwise might have

grown popular, Beecher Sprawley—a character in which I built up some eccentricities founded on the peculiarities of two friends, neither of whom detected me, and both of whom were among the warmest in their praise.

Edmund Yates, with whom at that time I had but the barest acquaintance, thus wrote of my performance: 'It is, I am told, the fashion with some journals to find fault with Mr. Bancroft. I am bound to state that the parts I have seen him fill in *Ours*, *Caste*, and the comedy now under notice, could not possibly have been better played. All the characters are of the *genus* "dandy." In former years, the actor personating them would have put on a palpably false moustache, would have worn spurs, carried a riding-whip everywhere, and would have simply substituted the letter "w" for the letter "r" throughout his part—the whole personation representing a creature such as had never been seen by mortal man off the stage. But I maintain that in voice, costume, bearing, and manner, Mr. Bancroft is an exact type of the class he is intended to represent, with a very slight exaggeration, which is as necessary for stage purposes as rouge itself. I am told that members of the class depicted object to Mr. Bancroft's delineation as a *charge;* but they forget that they are really the *charges* of society.'

The afterpiece to *How She Loves Him* (for audiences were hardly yet contented with a single play as a night's entertainment in those days) was

the old farce *Box and Cox*, cast as follows: Box, Mr. George Honey; Cox, Mr. Hare; Mrs. Bouncer, Mrs. Leigh Murray.

At this time a special company was formed to act *Caste* in the provinces, under the management of Mr. F. Younge; the actors engaged being few in number but strong in 'talent,' as the distribution of the parts will show: George D'Alroy, Mr. F. Younge; Captain Hawtree, Mr. Coghlan; Eccles, Mr. J. W. Ray; Sam Gerridge, Mr. F. Glover; Marquise de St. Maur, Mrs. Buckingham White; Esther Eccles, Miss Ada Dyas; Polly Eccles, Miss B. Harding. Perhaps no play was ever better suited to a travelling company; the parts being few, the scenery and dresses quite simple, and consequently the expenses were very much reduced. From those far-away days until now *Caste* has been constantly acted throughout Great Britain, and always with success; for many years under the direction of the late author's son.

NOTE BY MRS. BANCROFT.

I must ask for a brief pause in our narrative to tell of what was to me a sad loss. Poor Lady Harrington was suffering from her old winter complaint, bronchitis, and had been for some time so ill as to be confined to her bed. I had received a dictated letter from her, full as usual of kind thoughts and affectionate messages, saying how ill she was, but still hoping to recover soon. I was thinking about her very much, and was

naturally anxious, for this malady at her age was serious, and repeated winter attacks left her less able each time to bear their recurrence.

On the afternoon of Friday, December 27, my mind was unaccountably full of thoughts about her. I had been making some purchases in Regent Street, and on my way home in a cab was wondering, as I was driven through the crowd of vehicles, if I should ever see her in her well-known carriage again, with its snuff-coloured 'Petersham brown' body, the long brown coats, the silver hat-cords of the coachman and footman, the half-crescents of white leather which formed part of the harness across the foreheads of the horses.

On the following day I received the sorrowful news that Lady Harrington was dead at the time I had thought so much of her, and that I had lost a friendship for which Time can never lessen my gratitude.

RESUMED BY MR. BANCROFT.

The death of Lady Harrington reminds me that very shortly afterwards Charles Kean also passed away, and of my last sight of him, almost within view of the scene of his many triumphs. Early in the year I was on my way to pay a professional visit to Sir William Fergusson, when, close to Hanover Square, I had to stand aside while the figure of an evidently dying man was lifted from a carriage and almost carried into an adjoining house. Among the idlers and the passers-by who stopped

to stare at him, I alone recognised all that was left of the once famous actor. I already knew him to be ill; but this glance showed him to be stricken with mortal sickness. He looked, indeed, very like his own powerful realization of death in the last scene of *Louis XI.*

Very shortly afterwards he was laid at rest in the little churchyard at Catherington, in Hampshire, where he had made his mother's grave, having left instructions that he should be placed with her to whom, in her lifetime, he had been so devoted and true a son.

For the following anecdote of Charles Kean we were years ago indebted to our old comrade Arthur Wood, and cannot resist the temptation to try and repeat it: The carpenters of country theatres always dreaded Charles Kean's advent amongst them, for, in his earlier days on the stage, when he rehearsed, he would steadily go through his own scenes, word for word (although he must have acted the parts hundreds of times), slowly and deliberately dwelling upon each sentence, just as he would at night. During the whole of this time silence was strictly ordered to be observed all over the theatre; a creaking boot, a cough, a sneeze, the knocking of a hammer, would destroy the illusion, and distress the tragedian beyond measure. It was on pain of dismissal if any carpenter or other servant caused the smallest interruption during Mr. Kean's scenes. This naturally made the working men angry, as the

scenic preparation for the tragedies was extremely heavy, and in those days there was always a change of programme every evening.

These delays and cessations of work caused much ill-humour amongst the men, for when they really ought to have been having their dinners, they were compelled to work, or the scenes would never have been ready by night. Directly it became known by the carpenters that 'Kean was coming,' there would be shrugging of shoulders, groans, and various expressions of discontent. At the commencement of one particular engagement these men formed a conspiracy amongst themselves. The opening play was *Hamlet*, and they conceived a plan by which the royal Dane might be induced to 'cut short' his long soliloquies and so give them a chance of proceeding with their duties and dining at their usual hour, instead of being compelled to sit or stand looking at one another, not daring to move. The plot was this: One particular man was to place himself somewhere at the back of the gallery (reaching a loft under the roof, in fact, through a trap-door), being quite hidden from sight. It was settled that just as Kean began his great soliloquy this man should call out in a muffled voice to an imaginary fellow-workman. This was the result:

KEAN (after walking up and down the stage and then sitting down reflectively, in slow measured tones): 'To be—or *not*—to be' (long pause)—'that is the question.'

VOICE (far-off in front of house, calling): 'Jo Attwood!'

KEAN (stopping and looking in the direction, then commencing again after same business): 'To be —or *not*—to—be—that is the question.'

VOICE (nearer): 'Jo Attwood!'

KEAN (after waiting and looking about): 'To be or not to—be—that is the question.'

VOICE (farther off): 'Jo Attwood!'

KEAN (bewildered and annoyed, and in measured tones): 'Will somebody find Mr. Attwood?' (A pause)—'To be or, not to be—that is the question.'

VOICE (louder): 'Jo Attwood!'

KEAN: 'Until Mr. Attwood is found I cannot go on!'

'Mr. Attwood' could *not* be found, and the voice, which no one recognised, so well disguised was it, did not cease interrupting Kean, who, at last, gave up his attempt to rehearse and went home; upon which all the carpenters met in their work-room, shut the door, and, in shoeless feet, silently went through a sort of triumphant war-dance.

Kean shared with England's greatest actor, David Garrick, an inordinate love of praise, even from his humblest worshippers. During his brilliant management of the Princess's Theatre, one of the ballet-girls, who sometimes was given a few lines to speak, and who knew her manager's failing, used to haunt the wings and go into audible raptures over the tra-

gedian's acting. He was playing with great success a pathetic part, and tears flowed down the cheeks of the cunning girl, who eventually attracted personal notice from the actor. Soon she found herself promoted to a superior position. Her advancement, of course, was noticed by her companions, and to her greatest friend among them she told her secret, advising the girl to follow her example. Nothing loth, number two appeared at the wings, and almost howled with grief through Kean's chief scenes. She was, in fact,

'Like Niobe, all tears,'

when, to her amazement, he strode angrily by her, then, pointing her out, exclaimed, 'Who is that idiot?' *She* did not improve her position, for, since the advice of her knowing friend, the bill had been changed, and her manager was appearing in one of his most successful *comic* parts.

Among Charles Kean's most popular productions was that unique specimen of the supernatural drama, the *Corsican Brothers*. In the first act, Fabian dei Franchi addresses a letter to his brother as the vision appears to him. In our collection of autographs is one of these letters, written on the stage of the Princess's, which was given to us by Mr. Hastings, who was then the prompter of the theatre. It is a proof how deeply Kean was engrossed in the mock business of the scene, for it runs as follows: 'My brother—my dearest Louis—if this finds you still alive, write instantly—though

but two words—to reassure me. I have received a terrible admonition. Write—write.—C. K. 1st August, 1859.'

Charles Kean was a wonderful instance of the effect of resolute courage; for years he was laughed at and ridiculed by a large section of the press, and treated with absolute and unworthy cruelty by the withering pen of Douglas Jerrold. Through indomitable pluck he outlived it all, and heard himself publicly spoken of when he was the guest of the shining lights of the land as having 'made the theatre into a gigantic instrument of education for the instruction of the young, and edification, as well as instruction, of those of maturer years.' We hope that the ground sown with good seed by great actors of the past has not been neglected by their successors.

We were a little taken by surprise with regard to the failure of *How She Loves Him* to attract as we had hoped; so was Robertson, he not being ready with the comedy which we had all agreed should follow it. His new work also required much more elaborate scenery than any we yet had undertaken, the scene being laid throughout in Germany, where, chiefly in Baden-Baden, he had passed a holiday in the previous summer. However, all haste was made, and Robertson soon read his piece to us; the heroine being named after his bride. In spite of much charm in the dialogue and characters, the subject also being laid on fresh ground, as a drama we

felt there was a great falling off from *Caste* and the other early plays. Fortunately, the parts seemed wonderfully adapted to the company—a quality in which Robertson was perhaps pre-eminent—and the rehearsals were attacked with vigour.

Boucicault's kindness about *How She Loves Him* continued till the end of its run, and was not interfered with by the disappointment resulting from its failure to draw large houses. He even carried his good-nature so far as to decline to accept any fees throughout its career of forty-seven nights. When it was withdrawn he wrote this letter:

'My dear Mrs. Bancroft,

'I regret that my comedy was caviare to the public. I doubted its agreement with their taste and stomach, and so told you before it was played.

'If it has profited you little in money, lay by its experience.

'The public pretend they want pure comedy; this is not so. What they want is *domestic drama*, treated with broad comic character. A sentimental, pathetic play, comically rendered, such as *Ours*, *Caste*, the *Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*.

'Robertson differs from me, not fundamentally, but scenically; his action takes place in lodgings or drawing-rooms—mine has a more romantic scope.

'Be advised, then; refuse dramas which are wholly serious or wholly comic—seek those which

blend the two. You have solved this very important question for yourself. Comedy, pure and simple, is rejected of 1868.

'Believe me always

'Very sincerely yours,

'DION BOUCICAULT.'

We now append a copy of the first bill of Robertson's new comedy :

ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1868, WILL BE ACTED
A NEW AND ORIGINAL COMEDY, ENTITLED

PLAY.

By W. T. Robertson, the Author of 'Society,' 'Ours,' and 'Caste.'

THE GRAF VON STAUFENBERG	MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
THE HON. BRUCE FANQUEHERE	MR. HARE.
CAPITAN STOCKSTADT	MR. SYDNEY.
THE CHEVALIER BROWNE	MR. BANCROFT.
MR. BODMIN TODDER	MR. W. BLAKELEY.
FRANK PRICE	MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.
A CROUPIER	MONSIEUR EUGENE SILVEYRA.
ROSIE FANQUEHERE	MISS MARIE WILTON.
AMANDA	MISS LYDIA FOOTE.
MRS. KINPECK	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.

Time—The Present. *Scene*—Germany.

ACT I.—Der Brunnen ! Morning.
ACT II.—Das Alte Schloss ! Afternoon.
ACT III.—Der Vorplatz ! Evening. Der Spielsaal ! Night.
ACT IV.—Der Kursaal und Kurgarten ! The next day.

The success of the production passed our best hopes (demanding, in fact, an addition to the number of stalls), but certainly owed much to the acting and the care with which the tender plant was nursed. Hawes Craven painted some really beautiful scenery, the old ruined castle with an effect of the sun dancing

on the flowing river far below, being an ambitious attempt upon so small a stage. Robertson was fresh from Baden-Baden, and supplied a great deal of local colour with regard to picturesque detail outside the springs and in the gaming-room, so all went merrily on both sides the curtain.

On the night of the fourth performance of this new play, the Prince and Princess of Wales were at the theatre, which we note from the fact of its being the first time his Royal Highness came behind the scenes and honoured the green-room with a visit; it being also the first time we had either of us ever been in conversation with the Prince, whose well-known love of exactitude in such matters enabled us to correct a slight error in the Graf von Staufenberg's uniform.

Although in four acts the play was not a long one, and enabled us to do a new farce with it, which was more carefully cast than such trifles nowadays usually are, as Mr. Hare and Miss Lydia Foote played the chief characters. It was called *A Silent Protector*, and was written by T. J. Williams, the author of a funny piece, which has been occasionally acted (in plain fact, over a thousand times) by our old friend J. L. Toole, known as *Ici on Parle Français.*

During a temporary illness Hare's part was for a short time played by me. From this unexpected close acquaintance I judged that it seemed an excellent little piece, and I have sometimes been surprised that it has not been acted since.

We had for some little while lost the valued services, through a sad illness which ended in his early death, of Charles Stanfield James, our scenic artist (Mr. Hawes Craven having lately supplied his old friend's place). Mr. James was a charming artist. Two scenes among the many he painted for us live particularly in our memories—the Park in *Ours* and a seaside view in *How She Loves Him.* In fact, we gave orders that neither of them were to be painted out, or altered, so long as we were in the theatre. A set of beautiful water-colour drawings which he gave us of views round Hastings, where he went in search of health, apart from their value as works of art, are greatly prized by us.

Walking arm-in-arm with Montague one day in the early spring of this year, we turned from Piccadilly into the Burlington Arcade, and there met Henry Irving, to whom I had hardly spoken before. The first time I ever saw him was in the previous summer while we were at Manchester, when I was immensely struck by his rehearsal one morning of the part of Rawdon Scudamore in Dion Boucicault's play, *Hunted Down*, in which shortly afterwards, at the St. James's Theatre, he laid the foundation of his fame. Montague he already knew well. We were all young fellows then, Irving some three years our senior. We two turned back with Irving, when he and I began acquaintance, which ripened into friendship, to be more than once spoken of in this book.

Play went gaily on its career until some time in May, when its good fortune received a sudden check, like all things theatrical in that year, which was that of the great drought and most exceptional heat. The big receipts then began to fall off, the sun grew fiercer and fiercer, the theatres more and more deserted, and we felt our play would not last the season out. Its run, which reached a hundred and six nights, was the shortest of all the Robertson comedies. An addition at this time to the list of theatres I have acted in reminds me of the date, May 16th, that the old Adelphi favourite, Paul Bedford, so long the butt for Wright and afterwards for Toole, left the stage for good. On the occasion a farewell benefit was given to him at the Queen's Theatre, our contribution being the first act of *Play*. The new generation will know little of Paul Bedford, but older play-goers will recall his enormous body surmounted by a face very like that of a kitchen clock, and his perpetual 'I believe you, my boy!' In a little amateur manuscript magazine, the work of mutual friends for Mrs. Bancroft's amusement, and which we laugh at now sometimes, the contributors happily numbering H. J. Byron, are some remarks he wrote about Paul Bedford, among other comic 'Answers to (imaginary) Correspondents,' which we will quote:

'We beg to state that we never give any information about actors; but as you say you have taken us in ever since we came out, we will, for once in a

way, gratify your curiosity by giving a concise history of Mr. Paul Bedford. His father was an undertaker in a large way, and his mother was, of course, a *pall*-bearer. In early life he mixed much with mutes, and later on he mixed a good deal with liquids. He was so very sheepish when young that his parents thought of bringing him up to the "*baa*," but he always preferred the stage to the *pen*. He was very young as a child, but as he advanced in years he grew older. He grew so exceedingly fat, that his figure has been frequently known to fill the house. He had one severe illness, when he got up thin, but eventually came down plump. He has lost four double teeth, and is marked with a door-key in the small of his back—not that at first sight it is very easy to determine where the small is. He parts his hair from ear to ear, and takes his annual cold in the head every twelfth of October. He has several children, who take after their parent; but as the parent generally finishes his glass, it is needless to state that they take very little after him. He is partial to dumb animals, and keeps two hedgehogs and a highly-trained tortoise in his hind pocket. He is of a mechanical turn of mind, and once invented a machine for extracting the winkle from its tortuous shell. He offered it for four thousand pounds to Government, who, however, preferred a pin, and rejected the invention. He may be seen between the hours of seven and eleven every evening, except Sunday, when he goes out of town to visit an

aged grandson. He eats heartily when in spirits, and is seldom empty when in full health. He is particularly partial to broiled fish, and generally eats a *Paul Herring* for breakfast. He takes snuff, and sneezes twice regularly every birthday. He will be fourteen next April, if not thrown back by illness. *Paulo post future, Verb. sap. Jam satis. Whack row de row; such is life.*

'P.S. (by the Editor).—We have just heard that he has been grossly deceived in *the boy*, in whom he has *believed* for so many years.'

Soon afterwards came a letter, which was very welcome, for we were ever on the look-out for new plays:

'General Post Office,
June 2, 1868.

'MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'Is there any use in my finishing a comedy which I have on hand, and submitting it to you? Of course it should stand on its merits, but I have so much work that I would not go on with it if you were engaged, say, two-deep.

'Sincerely yours,

'EDMUND YATES.'

We heard the first act read, and decided to produce the comedy during our next season.

On June 20th, to eke out the season, we revived *Caste* for a few weeks, Montague replacing Frederick

Younge (who was then managing the country company) as George D'Alroy. The heat became more and more tropical, and we closed the theatre on July 25th. On the evening of the 27th we played the first act of *Caste* at Covent Garden for the benefit of William Harrison, the celebrated tenor. We wrongly guessed the time our item in the long programme would be given, and I remember an eccentric-looking trio, formed by Hare, dressed as the gas-fitter; Arthur Sketchley, in evening dress (ready for 'Mrs. Brown at the Play' between the acts); and myself as Captain Hawtree, walking over to the Opera Hotel in Bow Street in the dusk of an intensely hot evening, and asking for brandies and sodas, to the amazement of the occupants of the coffee-room, who could not understand Hare's familiarity with his companions, for he looked a veritable gasman.

Part of my time was taken up in the study of Tom Stylus, as we had arranged to re-open the theatre with *Society*, and I had resolved to resign my original part of Daryl to Montague.

We took a little old-fashioned furnished house this year at Broadstairs, and passed nearly the whole of our holiday very quietly there. Our chief amusement was driving in a mail phaeton, which, during our stay, fairly scoured the neighbourhood, and became well known on all the turnpike roads. The great heat continued, which was pleasant enough in idleness.

An eccentric man who had been employed as a

dresser in the theatre we took with us to Broadstairs as an indoor-servant, chiefly to give him the advantage of sea-air after a long illness, most of which he had recently passed in St. Mary's Hospital. We several times saw him there, and one day asked him if he knew what had really been the matter with him. He replied quite promptly, 'I'm afraid, sir, I don't; but I think what I had in my throat, the gentleman in the next bed has had in his stomach!' For fear we might be accused of appropriating an old *Punch* story, somewhat differently told, let us add that we supplied our friend George Du Maurier with the notion for one of his incomparable sketches, with which, years ago, he illustrated it.

Edmund Yates came down and stayed with us to read the second act of his comedy. We were disappointed, but hoped the third would put things straight, both with regard to plot and play.

One short week snatched from the peace of Broadstairs was passed in Paris in the full glare of an August sun, at the then most excellent Hôtel du Helder. This was in the days of the Empire—in fact, the very time of the Emperor's *fête*-day. *Le Duc Job* was being acted at the Français, and Got then was young enough to play the hero. *L'Abîme*, a French version of *No Thoroughfare*, by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, which had recently been played with immense success at the Adelphi, was the attraction at the Vaudeville, then situated on the

Place de la Bourse, with Pierre Berton the elder in the part Fechter played in London.

Our eccentric manservant expressed his views upon the investment of half a franc to see the moon from the big telescope in the Place Vendôme in something like this fashion: 'What did I think of it, sir? well, sir, it's very much like these furriners about other matters: they will have it that everything here is ever so much better than everything in our country. Now I don't see much difference between Paris and London; they burn a bit more gas, it's true, and perhaps it's a bit gayer. Oh, about the moon, sir! Well, it's not a bad moon—it's a good moon enough; but I don't think it's a bit better than ours: in fact, I think our moon has a trifle the best of it!'

Back from the glare and heat of Paris, at this mistaken season of the year, to calm and rest in our Thanet cottage; there to linger on the cliffs and sands in the hot noontide, and to ride or drive in the welcome evenings till summoned by the prompter.

A STORY BY MRS. BANCROFT.

When we who live and work in smoky London, with its thick slate-pencil sky, frowning, as it were, upon our busy, restless life, go into the peaceful country, what a contrast it is! The noiseless, restful country, with its soothing still air as welcome as a down-pillow to a weary head. But even in the midst of its tranquillity, a history now and then of painful and romantic interest can be

found. Misfortune is ubiquitous, and knows no 'With your leave, or by your leave.' The following episode happened during this holiday: In my country wanderings I often try to know something of the humbler folk, by going into their houses and talking with them. I soon win my way into their confidences, and they delight to tell me the little histories nearest to their hearts, glad, doubtless, to find a sympathetic listener. Some of their tales are so strangely sad in their simplicity as to make me feel that the tellers were made of finer material than one might suppose, and that the stuff had perhaps been spoiled in the cutting out.

They would relate their stories in such unstudied simple language, that if an artist were by to give them colour, or a poet to embellish them with a cloak of eloquence, how it would spoil them, so touching are they in their honest truthfulness, while at other times they bear such a comic aspect (although the tellers of them are innocent of the fact) that for the life of me I cannot resist a smile, and would give worlds to be allowed to laugh outright; but one must be cautious, for these poor people are often strangely sensitive.

One morning early I was walking on the beach with one of my married sisters, who passed this holiday with us, when our attention was attracted to a young fellow whom we both knew by going to his mother's cottage now and again and chatting with them there. He was hard at work, seemingly,

taking a boat to pieces. As we approached he recognised us, and touched his cap. 'Morning, ladies,' he said. 'You seem very busy,' I remarked. 'What are you doing?' 'Breaking up a boat, mum.' I looked closer, and was surprised to see that it was a new boat. 'What a pity!' I exclaimed. 'It appears quite new.' 'Yes, mum, it's new.' 'Badly made—something wrong about it, I suppose?' 'No, mum; as good and smart a boat as ever you see.' 'To whom did it belong?' 'To nobody, mum.' 'What do you mean?' 'Well, mum, when I say nobody, I means myself.' 'Well, you are somebody, surely?' 'I don't think I should be reckoned anybody. Nobody thinks much of me, and I don't think much of myself, maybe.' 'Is that why you are taking the boat to pieces?' 'Yes.'

I could see a history behind this, for the poor fellow uttered the last sentence with a shade of bitterness in his voice, and his face, which was by nature merry, wore an expression of sadness. We examined some of the pieces, and asked him to explain them to us. He was pleased at our curiosity, especially when my sister asked, 'Did you make the boat?' '*Yes.*' 'How clever you must be, for is it not a responsible thing to build a boat which is to carry safely so many human beings?' Then I added, with a smile, 'If boats could speak, what interesting stories they would tell, and how many lovers' vows might be repeated.' The young fellow looked hard at me, and said, 'Yes; but this one

shall tell no love-story, for I'm breaking of it up, you see.'

I looked farther, and pointing to a fragment on which *Alice* was painted in bright blue letters, I remarked, 'Oh! I see, you called the boat *Alice*—a pretty name. I am fond of the name of *Alice*.' He fixed his eyes on the name, and yet seemed to be looking far off. After a pause he said dreamily, 'Yes; it *is* pretty, and I—love it too—leastways, I *did*—and—yes, I love it still.' He bit his lips, and I could see a well of tears behind his words. There was a quiet dignity in his voice and manly suffering in his face that made me hesitate to intrude further on what I felt to be some grief.

I broke the brief silence by saying gently, 'Forgive me, I am so sorry.' I was about to go, when he said quickly, 'Don't go, mum. It's strange that you ladies should 'a happened to come to-day like this, just at the time when I was sadder than I've been since a year agone. You've been kind to my old mother, and 'ave give me lots a good advice about my drinkin' 'abits, which ain't so much my fault, if you know'd all about it.' He looked round to see that there was no one near enough to interrupt us, and said, 'Would you mind listening to me a while, ladies? It's very relievin' to get some one to take a little interest in one now and agin. I've nobody but my old mother, and she knows nothing of my troubles, for I've told her nothin' of 'em.'

We sat down on the beach, and could see that he

had a serious history to tell, for he reflected for a moment, as if to gulp down his emotion. 'If I smoke I can talk better. Will you let me smoke? Thankee.' He filled his pipe, and, after a few whiffs, went on in his Kentish dialect:

'Little more nor a year ago I was the 'appiest chap in these parts, for I loved a girl and she loved me. I was twenty-five then, and she was eighteen. She was that pretty, with blue eyes, so bright and true, as if heaven was inside 'em, and they couldn't tell a lie. We was engaged and goin' to be married. I 'ad bought and made from time to time bits of things for furnishin' a cottage a mile or two out yonder, for I'm a bit 'andy in carpenterin' and the like. I was that 'appy, I could 'ardly sleep, mum—she filled my 'ead noight and day. All at once a dandyfied young chap come here with a kind of tutor they called a "coach," what teaches young fellars to be gentlemen, you know, mum. She didn't know she was so pretty till he told her; he filled her mind with vain notions, and she begun a-lookin' at 'erself all day long in the lookin'-glass, and dressin' of 'erself more gay like. She was leavin' off being the simple lass I loved; she looked to me like a boat a-driftin' away somewhere, and I was losin' sight of her. This fellar was allus a-runnin' after her and givin' her things, so I made up my mind to marry her outright, although I was poor, and it was 'ard to live. All at once, one mornin', quite sudden, they both ran away.' His

voice failed him here, and after pausing for a second or two he added, 'A lump comes into my throat now and agin, mum. I 'eerd no more of 'er, for I never moved a step to follar her. I was sick in my 'eart, and it seemed chilled loik; but my old mother had to be seen to and took care of, so I up and set to work, without telling the mother anything except that my girl 'ad gone to a place in London. Well, things was prosperous with me, and every stroke of work I did brought in money, and in a few months' time I was on the road to puttin' by tidy sums, and soon I had as much as a hundred pounds in the bank, for I allus had a mind for savin'. Two months ago, I 'eerd that the fellar 'ad deserted my poor gal, and she and her baby-choild was starvin'. So I took the little cottage we was to 'ave if she 'ad been true to me; I puts in the bits of furniture wot I'd got together, and a little more to make it comfortable. I've never spoken to 'er, and I never will, I take my oath; but so long as I live she shall never want. She has stopped me from being the good man I wanted to be, and we can't now never come together no more; but I can't put on one side the remembrance of what she might 'ave been to me. That boat I built for 'er and me, and christened it after her, *Alice*. I painted the name in blue, because it was the colour of her eyes, and, in a drinkin' fit last night, I began a-breakin' of it up, as she 'as broken up my life.'

He was quite overcome, and, with his arm raised

to his eyes, cried like a child. After a pause, he said, 'And this is why I drink a bit at times, ladies; it's a bad habit, and I'll try to follow your good advice and give it up. I can but try; but, after all, it 'ardly matters!'

How near akin are truth and fiction! We lived again in the sorrows of Ham Peggoty and Little Em'ly; and almost under the shadow of 'Bleak House,' where Dickens stayed so long, we had listened to this pathetic story.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEASON OF 1868-69.

BEGUN BY MR. BANCROFT.

It may be of interest to note here, in contrast to the charges of the present day, that the price of admission to the stalls was raised at the beginning of this season from six to seven shillings, to the dress-circle from four to five shillings, and to the pit from eighteen-pence to two shillings; although there will be more to say on this subject presently. We resumed work on September 21st, with a revival of our first important success; but we had new material in view, as Edmund Yates and T. W. Robertson were both writing for us, the first-named being engaged on the last act of his accepted comedy, which we had arranged should be the next production, the author of *Caste* agreeing to be prepared with a work to follow it. *Society* was preceded by a new comedietta, written by J. Maddison Morton, called *Atchi* (the sound of a sneeze). Montague and Blakeley acted in this, the little piece being also the medium for Miss Carlotta Addison's first appearance at our

theatre. On this revival of Robertson's comedy the principal characters were cast as follows :

LORD PTARMIGANT - -	- MR. HARE.
LORD CLOUDWRAYS, M.P. -	- MR. TERRISS.
SIDNEY DARYL - - -	- MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.
MR. JOHN CHODD, SEN. -	- MR. W. BLAKELEY.
MR. JOHN CHODD, JUN. -	- MR. J. CLARKE.
TOM STYLUS - - -	- MR. BANCROFT.
OLINTHUS O'SULLIVAN, D.C.L.	- MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
LADY PTARMIGANT - -	- MRS. BUCKINGHAM WHITE. (Her first appearance at this Theatre.)
MAUD HETHERINGTON -	- MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON.

During the previous summer we were constantly told by a maidservant that 'a young gentleman had called,' who seemed very persistent about seeing us. One day, on returning from a walk, the girl informed me that 'the young gentleman' had pushed past her and walked into our little drawing-room, where he then was. I joined our visitor rather angrily, but was soon disarmed by the frank manner of a very young man, who, within five minutes, in the course of conversation, pointed to the window of a house opposite and said, 'That's the room I was born in.' (We then lived in a little villa in St. John's Wood.) Of course 'the young gentleman' was stage-struck, and 'wanted to go upon the stage,' adding that 'he was resolved that we should give him an engagement.' His courage and, if I may say it, his cool perseverance, amused and amazed me; the very force of his determined manner conquered me, and the upshot of our interview was that I did engage him. His name was William Terriss, and Lord

Cloudwrays, in *Society*, was the part in which he made his first appearance on a London stage.

It was this season that Mr. Edward Hastings first joined us as prompter and assistant stage-manager, a position he filled with us during the greater part of our management. Mr. Hastings, who, I believe, has been connected with the stage for half a century, and chiefly in leading London theatres, once told me, I remember, that I was the most *literal* actor he had ever met throughout his long experience as a prompter. I know myself to be so exact, that when I alter any words in a part intentionally, I always have those I intend to substitute entered in the prompt-book.

The programme, especially with Mrs. Bancroft's name absent from it, was not a particularly attractive one, although it proved a satisfactory stop-gap, for the expenses of the little theatre were a very different matter in those days, being in fact about half of what they reached at the end of our fifteen years there.

Early in this second run of *Society*, we received from Mr. Tom Taylor a manuscript copy of that admirable comedy *New Men and Old Acres*, written in partnership by himself and Mr. A. W. Dubourg. As we have seen it asserted in print, with Mr. Kendal's name as an authority for the statement, that we *refused* that play, the real facts of the case may be worth relating as a fragment of stage history. A letter accompanied the book, stating that the comedy

had been written for Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Wigan; but as they then were leaving, or had already left, the Queen's Theatre, it had gone back to the authors' hands. Tom Taylor went on to say that the character of Lady Matilda Vavasour had been written for Mrs. Alfred Wigan, and, as the manuscript came to us, it certainly was the better of the two principal female parts. Until we had read the play he preferred not to make any alterations, as, if we liked it, the part of Lilian could be written up for Mrs. Bancroft, or that of Lady Matilda changed into an elder sister should she prefer that character. We read the play, and at once expressed our wish to accept it, but told Tom Taylor we were bound in fairness to put before him the engagements we had already contracted, viz., to act Edmund Yates's comedy next, and had settled with T. W. Robertson for a new play to follow it. Tom Taylor hesitated for some time, but at last said, greatly to our regret, that the prospect of our producing *New Men and Old Acres* was so remote (for he regarded the success of the Robertsonian comedy as a foregone conclusion), that it was decided to withdraw the manuscript from our hands, and offer it to Mr. Buckstone at the Haymarket, where it was produced with pronounced success, giving Mrs. Kendal, then Miss Madge Robertson, the opportunity of creating the delightful part of Lilian Vavasour.

Although the following letter refers to a domestic matter, it is so very characteristic of the writer, and

our old friend, that we do not hesitate to give it the short space it will take up :

'5, Conduit Street,
November 2, 1868.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'Accept our united congratulations. May the infant grow as clever as its mamma, and as tall as its papa, and as good as both.

'With all good wishes,

'Believe me, my dear Bancroft,

'Yours very sincerely,

'H. J. BYRON.

'S. B. Bancroft, Esq.'

Meanwhile Edmund Yates had finished his comedy. We were, of course, in constant communication, which was rendered easier by the fact of his living at the time not far off in Baker Street. The eccentric manservant, who has been before mentioned, could never master certain names. That of Yates was especially a stumbling-block owing to an impediment in his speech, and by this man our old friend was always spoken of as 'the gentleman from Baker Schtreet' (while 'Ponsonby' grew in his mouth to 'Punchemberry'). *Tame Cats*, as the new comedy was called, did not, we began to fear, come out well at rehearsal; as is by no means unusual; scenes which had read well, *acted* tamely (no pun intended). The cast was a good one, as an extract from the bill will show, and we all worked bravely to make it a success; its performance being preceded by a

comedietta, by Charles Dance, called *Who Speaks First?* acted by Mr. Montague, Mr. Terriss, Mr. Blakeley, and Miss Carlotta Addison.

On Saturday, December 12, 1868, will be performed, for the first time,

TAME CATS:

An Original Comedy of Modern Life, written by Edmund Yates.

MR. WAVERHAM	MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.
MORTIMER WEDGWOOD	MR. BANCROFT.
MR. TWEEDIE	MR. W. BLAKELEY.
CHARLES HAMPTON	MR. CHARLES COLLETTE. (His first appearance.)
EZRA STEAD	MR. HARE.
BIDDLES	MR. H. W. MONTGOMERY.
MRS. WAVERHAM	MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON.
MRS. LANGLEY	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Her first appearance this season.)
MRS. JOPPET	MRS. BUCKINGHAM WHITE.
ANNIE TEMPLE	MISS AUGUSTA WILTON.
ELLIS	MISS ADA COATES.

NOTES BY MRS. BANCROFT.

While considering how best to make the scene of the first act, the garden of a pretty villa on the Thames, as effective and natural as possible, it occurred to us that a macaw with his gay plumage would be a beautiful bit of colour on the well-kept lawn. We purchased one of the handsomest birds I ever saw, and had a large stand made for him, which the bird seemed to appreciate immensely, especially when its bright tin dishes were well filled. A chain was attached to one of his legs; a degradation to which he took kindly, as, probably, the arrangement was not new to him. When 'Mac' was placed one morning on the stage and introduced to the company, he lost no time in making it understood that he pre-

ferred them at a distance. No 'Scratch a poll,' or 'Pretty dear,' or 'Kiss me,' seemed to impress the bird. Mr. Bancroft addressed him as 'Well, old man,' a familiarity which he resented by shrieks and by performing a kind of war-dance on his perch. The fact of being spoken to by a manager did not impress Mr. Macaw with respect in the least. As time went on, the bird grew more accustomed to his new home, but would permit no one but me to go near him; in fact, his preference became somewhat of a nuisance, for the moment I left the room where he was kept, he made hideous noises until I returned, and then became languid with affection. I had complete power over him, and when the sound of my voice announced my arrival every morning, he grew quite unmanageable until I went to soothe him. I was not sorry that he took this fancy to me, and arranged in the business of the scene to play with him, which, had he acted his part properly, would have been effective enough. He rehearsed admirably, and appeared quite reconciled to his position. At last the eventful night came; the scene was set, the overture was over, and the bell rang for the curtain to rise on a charming little scene, with *Mac*, in all his glory of colour, perched on his stand. But no sooner was the curtain up, than the crowded house, the glare of gas, and the applause, so alarmed the bird that, with his huge wings spread out, he sprang to the ground and waddled round and round the stage with deafening shrieks, dragging his stand

(which made as much noise as a hansom cab) after him. The more the audience laughed, the louder the bird screamed. When at last he found his way to the wings, no one dared touch him but me; so in the midst of the confusion I took hold of 'Mac,' and got him out of the way as quickly as possible. This was Mr. Macaw's first and last appearance, and when he left the theatre the next day, the dressers, carpenters, and other servants, hailed his departure in not the politest language. He had, I believe, fastened his beak in their garments more than once.

I presented 'Mac' to the Zoological Gardens, where, I believe, he is still to be seen: reflecting, doubtless, on his brief engagement at the Prince of Wales's Theatre.

Hare had to appear in *Tame Cats* as a shabby and disreputable creature who was a returned convict; he was, as usual, immensely excited about his 'get up,' which was mutually discussed over one of the many delightful dinners of those early days. I remember an amusing incident of his hunting in all sorts of back streets for some characteristic clothes, and after walking round and round a strange man who wore a very odd-looking hat, which Hare thought priceless, at last striking a bargain for its purchase with the bewildered owner, and carrying it off in triumph, with some horrible rags of garments which had to be well baked in an oven before they could be worn.

CONTINUED BY MR. BANCROFT.

The evening was not a cheerful one. The part of Mortimer Wedgwood, a mock poet and one of the 'Tame Cats' of the house, was resented by the audience and critics, some of whom mistook it for a caricature of the genius of one far above such ridicule, Algernon Charles Swinburne, no such idea having entered the head of either author or actor. We always thought the play, although by no means of the first rank, was harshly received. Cat-calls, and feline sounds of many kinds followed the final fall of the curtain, and we felt the play was doomed. Some years afterwards, while on a visit to the Temple, Goring—a charming river-side residence he then occupied—Edmund Yates asked us if we still had the prompt copy of his comedy, adding that he should like to read it. The book was hunted up and sent to him. In a few days it came back with this verdict: 'My dear B., it's poor stuff, and well deserved its fate.'

It was in this play that Charles Collette made his first appearance as a professional actor. He had for some time been the life and soul of his old regiment (3rd Dragoon Guards), *en amateur*, and his brother officers rallied round him, naturally enough, on the occasion of this new departure. They did their old comrade little good, however, by the vehemence of their reception of all he said and did in the small part of a Government clerk. The first words spoken by him were accidentally apropos enough, 'There's nobody about; I wonder what they're

saying of me at the War Office?' To the amazement of the rest of the audience, the friendly dragoons received this simple speech as the finest joke ever penned.

A story of his old soldiering-days, which Collette told us years ago, may be allowed a place here. A young fellow had been raised from the ranks and given a commission in another regiment. Before joining, according to custom, he was invited to a farewell dinner by the officers of his old regiment, being placed, as the guest of the evening, on the colonel's right, and helped to all the dishes first. He was a fine young fellow, but little used as yet to the ways of the polite world and the manners of other dinner-tables than the humble sergeants' mess of those days. The colonel, one of the truest type of gentlemen, did his best to put his young friend as much as possible at ease. The soup was served, and then came a servant to the guest's side, holding a large bowl which contained simply lumps of ice. The weather was hot, for this happened in India, and cold drinks were greatly in request. The young fellow stared at the bowl. The servant asked, 'Ice, sir?' The colonel chatted merrily to him on his left; others of the officers began to see the dilemma. 'Ice, sir?' again said the mess-waiter. The young new-made officer, in ignorant desperation, took some of the ice and put it in his soup. A smile began to play on the faces of one or two of the younger officers, when the bowl was offered to the

colonel, who went on talking to his guest, and now, without ceasing or moving a muscle, *also dropped a piece of ice into his soup-plate.* Those next either took their cue from him or let the bowl pass, and the young fellow breathed a sigh of relief in the thought that he had done the right thing. If ever soldier deserved the Victoria Cross, the colonel of that regiment did.

We had lost *New Men and Old Acres*, unfortunately; but Robertson, we found, had very nearly completed his comedy, so we withdrew *Tame Cats* after eleven performances, and as a stop-gap until he should be quite ready, and the rehearsals completed, we restored *Society* to the bills. During this brief revival Mrs. Buckingham White was suddenly taken ill, and could not act her part of old Lady Ptarmigant. Mrs. Bancroft, in the emergency, took her place, and I have rarely seen anything more ludicrous than she looked; every impromptu effort to produce the semblance of age only added to her then girlish appearance.

When *School*, as he christened the successor to *Play*, was read to us by Robertson, we were delighted with it, and were also responsible, through certain suggestions offered to him, for the addition of one of its most effective scenes—that between Jack Poyntz and Naomi—which is so admirable in contrast to the 'milk-jug scene,' which it immediately followed, and of which the *doyen* of the critics, John Oxenford, wrote: 'The dialogue between the young lord and

Bella, while they converse in the moonlight contemplating their own strongly-cast shadows, and fancifully commenting upon them, is replete with the prettiest conceits, in which it is hard to say whether wit or sentiment has the mastery.' The comedy was read to the company by the author—as only he could read his plays—on Boxing Day, and the parts were then studied as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, we lost the services of Mr. Blakeley, an actor whose special comic talent we had long thought highly of and hoped to retain, who failed to see the fun of Dr. Sutcliffe and its suitability to his method. When Mr. Blakeley decided, to our regret, to resign the part, Mr. Addison, for years a distinguished actor of 'old men' with Kean at the Princess's, and the Wigans at the Olympic, was engaged to take his place, and for a long time remained a prominent member of our company.

Tremendous efforts were made by all concerned to stem the brief current of bad luck which was running our way. The scenery was painted by that gifted artist Hawes Craven, who revels in such subjects as the 'glade in early autumn,' which was especially beautiful, and he worked long hours to be ready for us. The rehearsals only lasted three weeks, but being superintended by the masterly stage-management of the author, we found that time enough.

An incident may be worth recording here as some proof how innocently a writer may plagiarize.

Robertson came to me one day when the rehearsals were well advanced, and wished to introduce a line or two in the soliloquy I had to speak while sitting in the swing in the third act. He said, 'I went to a theatre last night, and was there introduced to a lady, who told me that, although I had forgotten her, she well remembered me, reminding me where we had met before, adding that I then made use of these words, "When Nature makes a pretty woman, she puts all the goods into the shop-window;" whether I ever did say them or not I haven't the least idea, but they seem to me quite good enough for Jack Poyntz, and will fit in with the sentiment of your speech.' A long time after, when reading Goldsmith's *Good-Natured Man*, to see if we thought it worth revival, I found this sentence from the mouth of Miss Richland: 'Our sex are like poor tradesmen, that put all their best goods to be seen at the windows.'

We felt, as the work progressed, very confident as to the result, and a few days before the production, in a letter to an old friend, I said, 'We are on the eve of the greatest success we have yet had.' We could not, of course, foresee that it would turn out to 'beat the record,' as they say, of all our productions; heading, as we shall take a later opportunity to show, all the more powerful plays we have presented to the public in the course of our career. The first announcement of our new play ran thus:

ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 1869,

WILL BE ACTED, FOR THE FIRST TIME, AN ORIGINAL COMEDY, CALLED

SCHOOL,

By T. W. Robertson, Author of 'Society,' 'Ours,' 'Caste,' and 'Play.'

LORD BEAUFOY	MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.
DR. SUTCLIFFE	MR. ADDISON. (His first appearance at this Theatre.)
BEAU FARINTOSH	MR. HARE.
JACK POYNTZ	MR. BANCROFT.
MR. KRUX	MR. F. GLOVER.
MRS. SUTCLIFFE	MRS. BUCKINGHAM WHITE.
NAOMI TIGHE	MISS MARIE WILTON.
BELLA	MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON.
TILLY	MISS AUGUSTA WILTON.

ACT I.—The Glade: Recreation. ACT II.—The House: Examination.
ACT III.—The Grounds: Flirtation. ACT IV.—The Grounds: Realization.

For the outline of the plot of this comedy, the author has acknowledged his indebtedness to a German play by Roderich Benedix, called *Aschenbrödel* (Cinderella), which doubtless accounts for the anomaly of finding a resident usher in a girls' school, as well as for the parody on the pumpkin and the glass-slipper in the last act.

The demand for seats was extraordinary, and such as we had never known before; extra stalls were added to a considerable number, and the receipts of the theatre much increased; opening, in fact, before us a vista of prosperity such as we had not dreamed of.

The critics were unanimous in a wealth of praise for theatre, author, and actors. The *Times* review of the production began with these flattering words: 'The fact is not to be denied, that the production

of a new comedy by Mr. T. W. Robertson at the theatre which, once obscure, has become, under the direction of Miss Marie Wilton, the most fashionable in London, is now to be regarded as one of the most important events of the dramatic year.' It was plainly evident that a long career of success was assured to the new play.

A great comedian of days gone by, Robert Keeley, passed away in the early part of this year, February 3rd, at his house in Brompton—a part of London in former times greatly favoured by actors, and in which the Keeleys had lived for many years. Mrs. Keeley still happily survives, although now more than eighty years old, having been born, as she rejoices in saying, in November, 1805—a fact made all the more interesting to me by a letter I received from her in November, 1875, in which she says, 'I shall be seventy to-morrow.' Without these admissions the fact would never be credited, for she still looks marvellously youthful and strong; only last Christmas Day (1887), indeed, Mrs. Keeley stood for hours on the stage of the Victoria Theatre, distributing the new sixpences which a kind friend had sent for a thousand poor theatrical children.

There is an old, and I dare say well-worn, theatrical anecdote, which was told to me years ago, of Keeley, by Leigh Murray (I once saw them act together in the Camp at Chobham), but, alas for the sake of veracity, I have since heard the story fathered on Sheridan! However, I will in a few

words relate it as I for years put faith in it. The name of a firm which, as fruiterers, supplied the household was Berry and Son. On one occasion the junior Berry wrongly sent some account to the actor, who answered the application for the money in this doggerel:

> 'I say, here's a small mull-Berry.
> Why send in this wrong bill-Berry,
> Which is not from me due-Berry?
> Your father, the elder-Berry,
> Would not be such a goose-Berry;
> But you must not look black-Berry,
> For I don't care a straw-Berry!'

Edmund Yates also tells, in his inimitable way, a story of Keeley which, perhaps, he thought too old and threadbare for a place in his 'Recollections.' I will be less modest, for the sake of a younger generation. The actor once bought a fancy work-basket as a present for his wife, which turned out to have some flaw in it, or to be not so well made as he expected. Keeley took the purchase back, and complained very much at the shop where he got it—which, we'll suppose, was that of the well-known firm of, say, Larkins and Potter—and insisted upon seeing one of the partners. Upon the approach of a mild gentleman-like person, who asked his cause of complaint, Keeley indignantly repeated his annoyance, and wound up by saying, 'If you are Larkins, damn Potter! but if you are Potter, damn Larkins!'

It may be curious to mention here the first morning performance we ever gave at the Prince of

Wales's Theatre, which was on March 6th, in the height of the run of *School*, when all the seats were booked every night long in advance. The experiment, however, was so novel, that it only attracted a moderate house in the daytime, and it was not for some years that *matinées* became popular.

The following letter will explain itself. I also received the news from two other friends and old members of the club, who both have long been known as lovers of the drama—Sir George Armytage, and Colonel (now General) Du Plat:

'Garrick Club,
Saturday, April 3, 1869.
3.55 p.m. Rain. Wind, S.W.

'MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT,

'As your proposer here, I have the great pleasure of informing you that you have just been unanimously elected to the Garrick Club. Trusting that this will not render you *unduly* undomestic, I add, with my congratulations to you, my best regards to Mrs. Bancroft,

'Ever yours faithfully,
'SHIRLEY BROOKS.'

As my mind wanders back over the time that has passed—now fast approaching twenty years—since as a young actor I received the honour of election to the Garrick Club, I think gratefully of the many happy hours I have passed inside its walls, and of the many good friends I have made there.

My memory, alas! recalls names and faces to be no more recalled in any other way. Let me light a cigar in the smoking-room, and, at peace in one of its big armchairs, invoke 'King Nod,' and visit his majesty's dominions in the land of dreams. Soon do I see the forms of Wyndham Smith and Andrew Arcedeckne seated together by the fire, and hear their interchange of stories; presently they are joined by phantoms of two painters, Elmore and O'Neil, and afterwards by 'Johnny' Deane. Over an early dinner I hear Phelps telling of 'a splendid day's fishing;' whilst Charles Mathews whispers to me that 'the only time in his life he began to get fat was when he took to riding.' I picture in the card-room the ever-kindly presence of Lord Anglesey (to whose hospitality I was for years indebted for a perfect view of the Derby from his private stand); the strongly-marked features and deep-toned voice of Sir Charles Taylor; the merry eye and musical brogue of Charles Lever (home on leave from his consulate, and keenly interested in the Tichborne trial); the gruff exterior which hid the soft and tender heart of Anthony Trollope; the occasional visits of courtly James Clay (the former companion of Lord Beaconsfield in foreign travel, and a monarch at the whist-table); and the more frequent presence of Sir George Colthurst. I see kindly 'Joe' Langford and dear old 'Bunsby' (Merewether, Q.C.) arrive for their rubber; 'cutting-in' with gentle, pipe-loving Edward Breedon (who

bore so little of the aspect of having once been a dandy in the Guards), the great novelist who wrote 'Hard Cash;' and Dr. Duplex, who once prescribed for Edmund Kean—who complete the table.

Higher still the smoke of my now half-burnt cigar ascends, and in its fumes I picture again delightful visits to the billiard-room, where I was first welcomed (although no player) by its constant *habitué*, Captain Synge. Over a crowded contest at 'black pool,' I see the portly form and hear the jovial laugh of General Napier; in turn comes the fine head of E. S. Dallas, suggesting portraits of Norwegian kings; by his side is the handsome face of the 'Amiable Brigand,' as some of us for years knew Palgrave Simpson; while next, fresh with some gossip from Pall Mall, is the cheery 'younger son,' as, until his sad and sudden end, Napier Sturt spoke always of himself. Other forms I see, many of their names being well known to the world; but most of them are, happily, still with us. As I go downstairs again I linger for a chat with my kind proposer, Shirley Brooks, fresh from a Wednesday *Punch* dinner (to talk with whom but for a minute meant to be sure of catching some pearl of wit), or to listen to a keen and caustic criticism from Tom Taylor, so soon to be his successor in the editorial chair. In the hall I interrupt two serjeants 'learned in the law,' by names Ballantine and Parry, who are talking out the points of that day's conflict in the Common Pleas; and, as I leave, am awakened by my surprise at meeting

Henry Byron, whose rare visits to the club, he laughingly said, made his annual subscription mean 'five guineas a wash'!

It will, I think, be interesting to note here, as it occurred at this time, a visit Hare and I received one evening, in the dressing-room we shared for years, from Arthur Cecil, asking our opinion as to whether he should, or should not, give up his private position (he was then secretary to some company), and accept an offer he had received from Mr. and Mrs. German Reed to join them in their well-known entertainment at the Gallery of Illustration. Our advice was that he should enter the players' ranks; if that opinion had any influence upon our old friend's mind, although we may have robbed one company of a good servant, we certainly gave another company a valued recruit and a faithful servant to the public.

The long career of a successful play somewhat ties the pen, and leaves little to relate of the theatre while it brightly but monotonously occupies its boards. *School* ran on through frost and snow, through fair weather and foul, to the same record of crowded houses, owing, doubtless, some share of its popularity to the success which had attended previous productions by the same author; for although, as we have said, it grew to be the greatest favourite of all Robertson's works, it cannot be compared in a dramatic sense with *Caste*, nor does it contain a scene to equal the second act of *Ours*. The public, how-

ever, being masters of the situation, chose to raise it to the position we have indicated, and it was not for us to quarrel with so pleasant a verdict.

Events outside our theatrical life are but little dwelt on in this book, unless they chance to deal with other public characters, and so lay claim to more general interest. Our continued good fortune both as actors and managers greatly enlarged our circle of friends in the world of literature and art, and, no doubt, was the key that opened the doors of many pleasant houses to us. Much of the happiness of our lives has come to us in this way, and later on our journey through these pages we may now and again refer to names made known throughout the world, whose owners, but for the calling we have followed and have tried to serve, we never might have met—at least in intimacy.

In the spring of the year, when the apple-blossoms made its big old-fashioned garden look beautiful, we saw a house in the Grove-End Road, near our little villa, which we felt justified in taking on a lease, and soon after occupied.

We also resolved to redecorate, and in part refurnish, the theatre in the summer on a more sumptuous scale than we yet had been able to afford; and the work for this was put in hand, being for months, in fact, preparing, so that the change might be made in the briefest time we could snatch from the play's success. Alterations and decorations for our new home, and the work in progress for the

theatre, kept us busy. The summer soon arrived: still *School* ran on its unbroken course, and we resolved to break the run for a few evenings only, elaborate arrangements being made for the completion of the redecoration by relays of men working all through the twenty-four hours of each day and night. We did not end the season, therefore, until Saturday, August 28th, on which night Charles Dickens—proving to be, alas! his farewell visit to the theatre—was among the audience, it being the hundred and ninety-second performance of *School*. Then we went away to Margate for ten days, which was the extent of the holiday we gave ourselves that year. Mr. and Mrs. Hare also did the same, and we all had lodgings in the Royal Crescent. Next door to the house we lived in, we remember, stopped 'Father Ignatius,' then, seemingly, quite a young man, and who was creating some sensation by his preaching in the town.

CHAPTER X.

THE SEASON OF 1869-70.

AFTER this very brief holiday, one day even of which was spent in London looking after the progress of the new decorations, we were back in town again, the run of *School* being resumed on Saturday, September 11th, when the following address was issued:

'Although I have closed my theatre for only eleven nights, I trust that the decorations with which I have embellished it during that short time —but which for months have been the subject of much anxious care—will be accepted as some proof of how sincerely I appreciate the great reputation of which the performances I have had the privilege to offer for public entertainment have been considered worthy. That reputation I shall jealously guard, and have the pleasure to announce that the brilliant pen to which I am indebted for *Society*, *Ours*, *Caste*, *Play*, and *School*, is already at work upon a new comedy—to be submitted to your judgment when

our *School*, which next week will reach its two-hundredth representation, finally breaks up.

'While altering and improving the theatre, I have added to the comfort of future audiences, and in the accomplishment of my pet project—abolishing the ordinary position of the orchestra—have been actuated by the same desire.

'In conclusion, may I venture to encourage the hope—always remembering the invaluable aid of the charming comedies which I have had the good fortune to produce, and the talents of those whom it is my pride to call the members of my company—that I have made some progress towards the advancement of the beautiful art to which my life has been devoted?

'MARIE WILTON.'

This was the first time the orchestra had been so placed as to be hidden from the sight of the audience. The space formerly occupied by the musicians was filled by rockwork, with running water, and a fernery. The new embellishments, which were mainly of light blue satin and of a sumptuous character then unknown in theatres (strong in contrast to the simple decorations they replaced), were very much liked, and we think had a share in maintaining the career of success which the performance of *School* still enjoyed. The high authority of the accomplished President of the Royal Academy will excuse our printing the following kind note on this subject:

'Holland Park Road.

'DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'A line to say that I think your theatre quite the dandiest thing I ever saw. I should have gone round to tell you so after the play, but that I had a complete extinction of voice, and could therefore not have made myself audible.

'How well it went off last night, and how dead tired of it *you* must be! not so *we*.

'Believe me,

'With kind remembrance to Bancroft,

'Yours very truly,

'FRED. LEIGHTON.'

It was about this time that we first detected signs of failing health in Robertson, who showed great difficulty in beginning work upon the play he destined to be our next production; although as yet we had no idea that he was already in the early grip of what was soon to prove a mortal and long-enduring illness. Fortunately the continued success of the existing programme allowed us to refrain from spurring him on to work, and to let him take things easily.

The two hundred and fiftieth performance of *School* deserves recording. It fell on November 17th, and was honoured by a second visit from the Prince and Princess of Wales. The evening was terribly foggy, and during the performance it became so exceptionally dense and thick that at the close the streets were

dangerous to traverse. At eleven o'clock the royal carriages, after great difficulty—the coachmen having once lost their way in Clifford Street, through mistaking that turning for Conduit Street—arrived safely, surrounded by a large body of the E Division of police, all bearing torches, who so escorted the Prince and Princess to Marlborough House. Our own journey home was a long and dangerous one, and many among the audience must have met with difficulties.

The following letter will best tell its tale:

'Edinburgh,
November 27, 1869.

'MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'You will never guess what I am going to ask you, and still less why I ask it.

'Will you and the principal members of your company come and play me a scene from a short act at Covent Garden on Tuesday morning, January 4th? "Good gracious!" you exclaim, "what on earth for?" Because it is my farewell benefit, previous to my leaving for Australia! I sail for Melbourne on the 31st of January. If after this you can resist, if you do not with tears in your eyes falter out, "I consent," you are made of sterner stuff than I give you credit for. Give my kind regards to Bancroft, and ask him to join in the good work. Say what you will play, and rely on it that the "approbation of our kind friends before us" will be certain.

'A line to 25, Pelham Crescent will reach me;

and in the meantime I will meditate on the most gracious form in which I can express my thanks.

'Faithfully yours,

'C. J. MATHEWS.'

The performance, which was in many ways memorable, took place on Tuesday morning, January 4th, at Covent Garden Theatre, before a most brilliant audience—all the leading actors of the day appearing in various selections. The principal members of our own company played the examination scene from *School*, in which Naomi Tighe could not resist improvising an extra question to be put to her by Dr. Sutcliffe as to 'what she considered the most valuable possession of Australia?' The answer, 'Charles Mathews,' was, of course, a good one for the occasion, and appealed at once to the sympathies of the audience. The final item was from Sheridan's *Critic*, and the cast will justify a reprint of part of the programme, which was drawn up by Mathews himself in the following amusing way :

DANGLE	MR. ALFRED WIGAN.
SNEER	MR. BARRY SULLIVAN.
PUFF	MR. CHARLES MATHEWS.
UNDER PROMPTER	MR. CHARLES MATHEWS, JUN.
PROMPTER	MR. ARTHUR SKETCHLEY.

CHARACTERS IN THE 'SPANISH ARMADA.'

LORD BURLEIGH	MR. BUCKSTONE.
GOVERNOR OF TILBURY FORT	MR. FRANK MATTHEWS.
THE EARL OF LEICESTER	MR. J. CLARKE.
SIR WALTER RALEIGH	MR. LIONEL BROUGH.
SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON	MR. W. H. PAYNE.
MASTER OF THE HORSE	MR. J. D. STOYLE.
BEEFEATER	MR. J. L. TOOLE.

WHISKERANDOZ - - - -	MR. COMPTON.
FIRST SENTINEL - - - -	MR. F. PAYNE.
SECOND SENTINEL - - -	MR. H. PAYNE.
FIRST NIECE - - - -	MRS. KEELEY. (Who has kindly consented to appear.)
SECOND NIECE - - - -	MRS. FRANK MATTHEWS.
TILBURINA - - - - -	MRS. CHARLES MATHEWS.
CONFIDANTE - - - -	MRS. CHIPPENDALE.

The PUBLIC is respectfully informed that in consequence of the overflow to all parts of the House, the BAND has been actually washed out of the Orchestra. Under these distressing circumstances, a GRAND PIANO has in the handsomest manner volunteered to make its first appearance on any Stage, and the following Gentlemen have kindly consented to officiate on the occasion:—Mr. JULES BENEDICT, Mr. J. L. HATTON, Master HATTON, Mr. T. GERMAN REED, Mr. ARTHUR SULLIVAN, Mr. FERDINAND WALLERSTEIN, Mr. BETJEMANN, etc., etc., etc., who have promised to keep the Instrument in such subjection that it is hoped the volume of sound will not prove too overwhelming for the size of the House.

The NEW SCENERY has not been painted for the occasion, and consequently will not be exhibited.

The COSTUMES, being by Mr. SAMUEL MAY, are too well known to need further encomium; and being priceless in his eyes, he has declined to make any charge for them.

The WIGS of Mr. CLARKSON will speak for themselves, and in the case of 'Lord Burleigh' will speak for him also.

The PROGRAMMES being in the handsomest manner supplied gratuitously by Mr. RIMMEL, may be purchased (if preferred) at any fancy price that may be agreeable.

A few nights afterwards a complimentary and brilliantly attended banquet was given at Willis's Rooms to Charles Mathews, at which he presided himself, and, as chairman, proposed his own health.

We extract a few sentences from a most amusing speech, delivered in his inimitable way:

'The most important task assigned to me has now to be fulfilled, and I rise to propose what is called the toast of the evening with a singular mixture of pleasure and trepidation. I was going to

say that I was placed in not only a novel but an unprecedented position, by being asked to occupy the chair to-day. But it is not so. There is nothing new in saying that there is nothing new; and I find in the *Times* newspaper of October 3rd, 1798, an advertisement of a dinner given to Mr. Fox at the Shakespeare Tavern, Covent Garden, on the anniversary of his first election for Westminster. "The Hon. Charles James Fox in the chair." Here is a great precedent; and what was done in 1798 by Charles James Fox is only imitated in 1870 by Charles James Mathews. I venture to assert, and I think I may do so without vanity, that a fitter man than myself to propose the health of our guest could not be found; for I venture also emphatically to affirm that there is no man so well acquainted with the merits and demerits of that gifted individual as I am. I have been on the most intimate terms with him from his earliest youth. I have watched over and assisted his progress from childhood upwards, have shared in all his joys and griefs, and I assert boldly, and am proud to have this opportunity of publicly declaring, that there is not a man on earth for whom I entertain so sincere a regard and affection. Indeed, I don't think I go too far in stating that he has an equal affection for me. He has come to me for advice over and over again, under the most embarrassing circumstances, and what is still more remarkable, he has always taken my advice in preference to that of anyone else.'

Needless to say that this speech was interrupted at every point by peals of laughter.

Another instance of Charles Mathews's delightful phase of humour occurred in a speech he made as chairman of one of the Royal Theatrical Fund dinners, when, with inimitable composure, he remarked: 'The late Douglas Jerrold once said to me that he did not despair of living to see the day when I should be found walking up Ludgate Hill on a muddy morning, with a cotton umbrella under my arm, to invest my funds in the Bank of England. I am sorry to say that Douglas Jerrold did not live to see that vision realized. The only step that I have advanced towards it is, that I have bought the umbrella.'

It was while Charles Mathews was being fêted, as his great talents and universal popularity deserved, that another delightful actor, much his junior, died, unhappily after long suffering, and in comparative obscurity—poor Leigh Murray, who passed away at the early age of forty-nine. We both had known him, and to know him meant soon to grow fond of him. Like so many of us, he had but one enemy—himself.

The sensation caused by Charles Dickens's readings had, some little time before, led to an influential theatrical meeting, and a petition to the great novelist to grant the actors an opportunity of hearing him by giving a reading in the morning, for this was long before the days of *matinées*, which were only then

known to pantomimes. Dickens's love for everything dramatic prompted him in charming terms to acquiesce at once, but his serious illness prevented the fulfilment of the promise until this time, when two morning readings were announced at St. James's Hall. The first was the *Christmas Carol*, the second comprised *Boots at the Holly Tree Inn*, and the terrible 'Sykes and Nancy' selection from *Oliver Twist* (the strain and exertion of which, doubtless, through frequent repetition when his health was bad, went far towards killing him). Two vast audiences thronged the large hall. We were seated in the front row of chairs, and plainly saw the tears provoked by the wonderful reception the actors gave Dickens directly he stepped upon the platform. Those who had heard him often said he read as if inspired—certainly he never had a finer audience. We all seemed spell-bound under his varying powers, and after this lapse of many years the emotions he so quickly in their turn aroused live in the memory, and will be there quite vividly while we have life. Feelings like these make one grateful to have, even for a few brief hours, fallen under the influence of his genius.

Another reading, of a strange and curious nature, one went to see and hear soon afterwards at St. George's Hall, was *Hamlet*, read by Mr. Bellew, while living actors, appropriately dressed, followed the text in dumb show. The effect, to tell the truth, was somewhat ludicrous, and prevented appreciation of Bellew's great ability, it being an open secret that

he had greatly aided Fechter in many readings when the celebrated French actor played the part and drew the town to the Princess's.

NOTE BY MR. BANCROFT.

Matters simply of home life, merely joys or sorrows, have been thought by both of us to have no claim to be recorded in this book; and if, for a moment, I raise the veil that shrouds such things, and allude in this paragraph to a wretchedness that befell us at the time, it is due to the still keen remembrance of a grief which—though briefly—interfered with my duties as an actor. A baby boy had recently been born to us. One night, while playing Jack Poyntz (her sister had taken my wife's place for some time), nearly at the end of the play, I was called from the stage and summoned home, a child-illness having quickly grown alarming. In a few hours the little being died, and, while we lived there, saddened the house in which he slept away his thirty days of life. The thoughts of those days that followed can be ever raised, and the ghosts of them can be never laid.

The same form of sorrow—and much at the same time—befell those living in the house adjoining ours. To mutual sympathy we then owed the acquaintance, and afterwards the friendship, of Admiral and Mrs. (now Sir Edward and Lady) Inglefield.

Robertson had now become very ill indeed, and, after several consultations with eminent physicians,

we learnt in how dangerous a condition, from serious heart mischief, he truly was. He had finished three acts, out of four, of a new play to succeed *School*, which, having been acted at the time about three hundred and fifty nights—in those days an unprecedented 'run'—we felt should be soon withdrawn, so that in its turn it might still have life to bear revival. The invalid's health for awhile prevented his leaving his house, so that he was quite unable to go to the theatre, or face the fatigue of rehearsals. One of us (Mr. Bancroft) therefore undertook to read the play to the company; Mr. Coghlan, being at this time added to it, engaged to take the place of Mr. Montague, who had asked that he might be released in order to enter into the management with his and our friends, Thomas Thorne and David James, of a little theatre, the Vaudeville, recently built in the Strand, and which, with an excellent company, including Henry Irving, George Honey, and Ada Cavendish, they soon made popular.

Poor Montague gave us a charming souvenir of the happy years he had passed with us, all the more valued by us since his early death.

The new comedy was received with enthusiasm by the company, and rehearsals were at once commenced. After a time, we felt a sense of weakness in the work—in spite of its delicate charm, its many Robertsonian beauties—and were distressed to find a growing fear lest it should not act so well as it had read. The end of the play was dictated by the

author from his sick-bed, and bore the signs of his weakened condition. We felt strongly, in this sad state of things, that an adverse verdict might be fatal to the slender thread by which he held his life. No assurance from us will be needed to say that all concerned worked hard and with real affection to avert it.

If ever a play was snatched from failure, this one was. It was the first we rehearsed for so long a time as six weeks, and, towards the end, we used to go up to Haverstock Hill and show poor Robertson, act by act, what we hoped to do with his work —he being a little better in the finer weather, and able to reach his drawing-room.

Almost until it had to be announced, the comedy remained unchristened, when a conversation between us, as we were driving to one of its rehearsals through the Regent's Park, led to an inspiration on the part of Mrs. Bancroft, who suggested that it should be called *M. P.* This bright idea was immediately telegraphed to cheer the author, who answered, 'Send the happy letters to the printer, and tell Marie I owe her five hundred pounds for them!'

School was withdrawn after three hundred and eighty-one performances, and might, we truly believe, have been played for another year, but 'that way madness lies.' So, on Shakespeare's birthday, we produced the new comedy with many fears and anxious forebodings for its fate.

On Saturday, April 23, 1870, *will be acted*

M. P.,

A NEW AND ORIGINAL COMEDY, BY T. W. ROBERTSON,

The Author of 'School,' 'Play,' 'Caste,' 'Ours,' and 'Society.'

DUNSCOMBE DUNSCOMBE	MR. HARE.
CHUDLEIGH DUNSCOMBE	MR. COGHLAN.
TALBOT PIERS	MR. BANCROFT.
ISAAC SKOOME	MR. ADDISON.
MR. BRAN	MR. CHARLES COLLETTE.
MR. BRAY	MR. F. GLOVER.
MR. MULHOWTHER	MR. MONTGOMERY.
CECILIA DUNSCOMBE	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Mrs. Bancroft.)
RUTH DEYBROOKE	MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON.

ACT I.—The Lawn: The Candidates. ACT II.—The Lawn: The Addresses. ACT III.—The Library: The Sale. ACT IV.—The 'Rose' Room at the 'British Lion,' Bramlingdon: The Poll.

Our terrors were soon set at rest by a brilliant success, doubtless partly owing to the reputation achieved by our previous productions of the author's works. Poor Robertson's state, unable as he was to leave his bedroom, may be imagined. The best step we could at the moment take to relieve his great anxiety, was to despatch messengers in hot haste after every act with the good news of their reception. This success, we have no doubt, prolonged his life at least by months, and rekindled for awhile the little flicker of hope that was left to him.

So great was the demand for seats that the pretty rockwork and fernery were abolished, never to be reinstated, and a prosaic row of stalls reigned instead; these seats had now encroached very much

on the space allotted to the pit, and could not have been otherwise added to.

We have no wish or intention to weary the reader with long press extracts, but a few words, with a special reference to the author, from an exhaustive article written by the accomplished pen of Tom Taylor, who, through an illness of John Oxenford's, replaced him on the *Times*, need no apology :

'Mr. Robertson has added another leaf to the garland he has so honestly and honourably won at this theatre. None of his "first nights," we should say, can have been more genuinely and pleasantly successful than that of his new comedy, *M. P.*, on Saturday. . . . In the way of light comedy there is nothing in London approaching the pieces and the *troupe* of the Prince of Wales's taken together. Author, actors, and theatre seem perfectly fitted for each other. . . . Paris itself furnishes no exact *pendant* to this theatre and these plays. The Gymnase would be, on the whole, the nearest parallel ; but the staple of pieces at that house is heavier and more solid than Mr. Robertson has created for the Prince of Wales's. These comedies are, indeed, so unlike other men's work, that they amount to a creation. Light as they are, there is in them an under-current of close observation and half-mocking seriousness which lift them above triviality. Mr. Robertson is perfectly seconded by his actors. Miss Marie Wilton is the actress who, of all now on

the stage, has preserved most of the arch humour and shrewd significance of Mrs. Keeley, while her line of parts combines with these a refinement which in Mrs. Keeley's usual business would have been misplaced.'

The prosperous course pursued by *M. P.*—for success is ever a most potent drug—had even helped its suffering author to a gleam of apparent strength, which happily allowed him, after it had been played for a few weeks, to see and highly praise a performance of the comedy; soon after which he was strong enough to go with Mrs. Robertson to the seaside, where he again began to write a little, and think much of works, as he hoped, to come.

A special performance of the *School for Scandal* and *Married Life* was given on May 14th, at Drury Lane, for the benefit of the moribund Dramatic College. The cast of the latter comedy included Webster, Buckstone, Toole, and the Kendals; while Sheridan's masterpiece was acted by a strange mixture of the old and new schools, as follows: Sir Peter Teazle, Mr. Chippendale; Sir Oliver Surface, Mr. Addison; Joseph Surface, Mr. Alfred Wigan; Charles Surface, Mr. James Anderson; Crabtree, Mr. Compton; Sir Benjamin Backbite, Mr. Bancroft; Moses, Mr. J. Clarke; Careless, Mr. Montague; Trip, Mr. H. J. Byron; Snake, Mr. T. Stuart; Lady Teazle, Miss Amy Sedgwick; Mrs. Candour, Mrs. Chippendale; Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Alfred Mellon; Maria, Miss Edith Stuart.

[Although I (S. B. B.) always detested scratch performances, I consented to play Sir Benjamin Backbite, having, as I thought, some ideas of the character as a 'macaroni' of the period which might, perhaps, attract attention, from their novelty, to the exponent of the part. Impressed with this notion, I went to the *one* rehearsal which the play received in its entirety; but the first suggestion I ventured to make, which was opposed to the old conventional business, paralyzed anything like progress; there was nothing for it but to repent of having agreed to appear, and to reserve my notions for awhile (some of them were found to be of value by Mr. Lin Rayne when he played the part in our production of the *School for Scandal* later on, a view of the character which has been adopted on many subsequent revivals of the play). I may add that at this performance I shared a dressing-room with Compton, whose companionship, though brief, was delightful.]

Following hard upon the great delight he had so recently given to the London actors—the date being June 9th—'the gaiety of nations was eclipsed' by the death of Dickens. Even at this lapse of time we easily recall the shock of it, which shook the land almost as if a death had happened in each household. In reply to a recommendation for some remedy for neuralgia, from which it may be remembered he sadly suffered at the time, and but a few short days before his fatal seizure, this letter came to us :

'Gad's Hill Place,
Higham by Rochester, Kent.
Thursday, May 31, 1870.

'MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'I am most heartily obliged to you for your kind note, which I received here only last night, having come here from town circuitously to get a little change of air on the road. My sense of your interest cannot be better proved than by my trying the remedy you recommend, and that I will do immediately. As I shall be in town on Thursday, my troubling you to order it would be quite unjustifiable.

'I will use your name in applying for it, and will report the result after a fair trial. Whether this remedy succeeds or fails as to the neuralgia, I shall always consider myself under an obligation to it, for having indirectly procured me the great pleasure of receiving a communication from you; for I hope I may lay claim to being one of the most earnest and delighted of your many artistic admirers.

'Believe me, faithfully yours,

'CHARLES DICKENS.'

At the sale of the great novelist's effects at Christie's, which followed shortly afterwards, and which realized, after two exciting days, between nine and ten thousand pounds—Barnaby Rudge's stuffed raven alone fetching a gigantic sum, being knocked down eventually to the late Mr. Nottage (recently Lord Mayor), after a keen competition between himself and Andrew Halliday—we bought a little souvenir

which reminds us sadly of a loss which was all men's.

Not the least of the many debts the nation owes Charles Dickens is the abolition of the dreadful paraphernalia formerly attached to our funerals. Those terrible cloaks, scarves, and enormous hat-bands, or 'weepers,' which once so commonly formed part of 'the trappings and the suits of woe,' have, owing mainly to the great master's pen, been swept away, together with the dreadful 'mutes' who used to stand as sentinels outside the house of mourning. The mere mention of them recalls a story of a funeral which took place from the home of a notably mean man on a bitterly cold day. So keen was the east wind, so sharp the frost, that the chief undertaker, out of pity for the two unfortunates who were fulfilling under such hard conditions the position of mutes, asked the master of the house if he might send the men some brandy. 'Brandy for the mutes! Nothing of the sort. Never heard of such a thing! If they're cold, let 'em *jump about!*' This, surely, must have been the same person whose character was once thus described by an acquaintance who wished to convey a full idea of his parsimony: 'Mean, is he? Why, when his poor wife died he buried her from the Stores!'

Held down, as it were, by long runs, and 'obstructed,' so to speak, by our antipathy to benefits, Mr. Hare asked our permission, which was at once accorded, to give a special *matinée* at the Princess's

Theatre. The programme selected was the farce of the *Bengal Tiger*, in which Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Wigan acted, and Boucicault's comedy, *London Assurance*. The esteem in which the young actor was held will, perhaps, best be proved by simply recording the cast of the favourite old play :

SIR HARCOURT COURTLY	MR. HARE.
CHARLES COURTLY	MR. H. J. MONTAGUE.
MAX HARKAWAY	MR. ADDISON.
DAZZLE	MR. BANCROFT.
DOLLY SPANKER	MR. BUCKSTONE.
MARK MEDDLE	MR. J. L. TOOLE.
COOL	MR. JOHN CLAYTON.
SOLOMON ISAACS	MR. C. COLLETTE.
LADY GAY SPANKER	MRS. BANCROFT.
GRACE HARKAWAY	MISS CARLOTTA ADDISON.
PERT	MISS E. FARREN.

Another attraction was that Arthur Sullivan and Frederic Clay played the piano between the Acts. Although *M. P.* still continued its successful career, we could not rob ourselves of our holiday, which had been so restricted in the previous year, and on August 12th we brought the season, the prosperity of which had known no check, to a close, and went away to Scarborough. There a happy month was spent at the Grand Hotel, where we added to our list of friends that strange and interesting creature, the late Henry Fothergill Chorley : a man who neither loved nor hated by halves, but of whose nature we fortunately only knew the tender side. We grew to know him well, which meant to like him very much. We afterwards found out that he first felt an interest in us through having accidentally overheard

the terms of affection in which we chanced to speak of Dickens; Chorley's love for the great writer being well known, and his grief at his recent death profound.

When that sad event occurred, he referred to it in these pathetic terms: 'I have a letter from poor Mary. If universal sympathy of the warmest kind in every form could soften the agony of such a trial, they will have it in overflowing measure; but it will not give back one of the noblest and most gifted men I have ever known, whose regard for me was one of those honours which make amends for much failure and disappointment. I cannot express to any human being the void this will make for me to my dying day.' As his friends thus fell from him Chorley would say, with a sigh, 'Ah me! there goes another page from my book: shall I have courage to try and replace it by a new leaf?'

NOTE BY MRS. BANCROFT.

Mr. Chorley was one of the strangest mixtures of hate and affection I ever met. I told him so once, and he replied, 'They *don't* mix; they are separate always. There is, with me, no half-way house. I could not bear to be indifferent; it is too colourless and flat, too uninteresting. I must like very much or not at all.'

There was a lady in the hotel who seemed to spend her time in the amiable occupation of picking everybody else's character to pieces; she had a terrible effect on Mr. Chorley. When he saw her

approach, he would take a long circuitous route to avoid meeting her, and although she was very handsome, he would never allow it, saying, 'With an ugly tongue no woman can be handsome.' He was a remarkable-looking man, a spare figure, a reddish face, with small blue, searching, twinkling eyes; his voice was thin, and he spoke in a petulant, incisive tone, with a keep-away-from-me action of the hand. He latterly wore a black velvet skull-cap with a coloured tassel, and a neck-tie of a brilliant hue. I was fortunate in being admitted into his friendship, and, strange to say, could speak frankly to him at any time, no matter what his mood. I obtained his goodwill in an unusual way; but then he was an unusual man. He asked me one evening, soon after we first met, if I would recite a poem of his at some entertainment that was to be given, and I replied that I was there for a holiday; and, as my work had been very heavy all the season, I felt that I must not deprive myself of one hour of my rest. Learning a recitation meant at least three or four days' drudgery, so I gave a decisive *No.* On the following day he asked us to sit next to him at dinner, and he became every day more and more friendly. I said to him one evening, laughingly, 'How is it that you seem to like me when I so firmly declined to recite your poem?' He replied in his thin, shrill voice, but with a pleasant, twinkling smile, 'I liked your impudence.' He then added more seriously, 'You had courage to speak as you felt; I like courage. You are not

afraid of me, so I like *you*.' He would resent a joke at his expense from anyone he disliked in a sharp and bitter manner; but, as he said, preferred a brick from one he liked to a handsome present from one he *dis*liked. He railed violently at the German bands and organ-grinders, who persistently played near his window 'Champagne Charley is my Name,' a popular comic song at that time, saying he should like to burn all music-halls. One evening he invited me to share his pint-bottle of champagne, saying, 'I always drink champagne, as you see; I prefer it to any other wine.' I instantly replied, 'Champagne Chorley.' He laughed a good deal, and said, 'I hate puns, but that is too good.' I am convinced that no one else would have dared to perpetrate such a joke at his expense.

This was the period of the Franco-German War, when the telegram-board in the hall of the hotel was besieged, as day by day disaster following disaster for the French was chronicled, culminating in their humiliation at Sedan. Indeed, the sounds of a tottering old newsvendor's piping voice still ring in one's ears, as he paraded the streets, with his monotonous, reiterated cry, 'The *Yorkshire Post!* the *Leeds Mercury!* containin' the last words of the poor old Emprer afore he resigned hisself into the hands of the Proosians!'

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEASON OF 1870-71.

THERE was at this time some discussion in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, led by Dion Boucicault, as to the then charges for admission to the London theatres being too high. The following letter addressed to the editor may be worth appending, to mark how different they then were, and how greatly the prices have since still further been increased:

'SIR,

'I am so great an admirer of Mr. Boucicault as an author, as an actor, and as a manager, and so sincere a believer in most of his professional views, that I hope he will forgive me for once venturing to differ from him, as I do about his letter addressed to you last week on "English and American Theatres," which states that fifty cents was the highest charge for admission to Niblo's Theatre. In September, 1858, I paid a visit as a boy to New York. Among my most pleasurable recollections of the trip are

many evenings passed at Niblo's, where Mr. and Mrs. Boucicault were acting; and although the prices were prominently advertised as twenty-five and fifty cents, there were orchestra stalls at seventy-five cents, which in October (to the number of a hundred) were raised to a dollar. As I have almost a mania to be correct when I interfere with dates and figures, I beg to enclose two playbills in confirmation of my statement, adding only that I never spent a dollar with greater satisfaction, or received better value for my money, than on the many nights I occupied a stall during the brilliant engagement Mr. and Mrs. Boucicault played there.

'So much for America. Now for England. For some years accounts of every shilling expended and received at the Prince of Wales's Theatre have passed through my hands; so I may perhaps be able, with your permission, to add a few items, resulting from that experience, to the vexed question whether high or low prices of admission to theatres are most liked by the play-going public, and—an equally important consequence, I imagine—which tend most to afford the best entertainment.

'Until September, 1868, the prices were considerably lower to every part of the Prince of Wales's Theatre than at present. The pit and amphitheatre (although then decreased in size) have since not only yielded more money, but show a greatly increased numerical attendance; and I may add that Mr. Robertson's two comedies, which, perhaps, would

appeal most to those portions of the house, *Ours* and *Caste*, were both produced by Mrs. Bancroft at the cheap prices. The upper boxes, which formerly were chiefly valuable in the event of an overflow from other seats, were nearly doubled, both in numbers and in price, and are now constantly secured in advance. On several occasions in the old days, intending visitors to the dress-circle have actually left the theatre when told by the money-takers that the charge was only three shillings, but no one grumbles about paying five shillings; while the stalls, which formerly seated fifty-four persons at six shillings, now hold one hundred and twenty-seven at seven shillings, and, to my certain knowledge, a very large percentage of them, throughout the first run of *M. P.*, from last April to August, were sold in Bond Street at eight shillings, and in some cases at still higher prices.

'Your obedient servant,

'S. B. BANCROFT.

'Garrick Club, *October* 24.'

Breaking the run of a successful play is always dangerous, and, although in our case the risk had previously escaped bad results, on this occasion, when the theatre was reopened in the autumn, we found that the great attraction of *M. P.* had waned considerably, and from the hundredth night until its withdrawal, some sixty more, it attracted only moderate audiences.

We began to find ourselves somewhat in a fix to

decide upon its successor, there being no chance, we felt and feared, of a new play by Robertson; although, poor fellow, being, or appearing to be, ignorant of the gravity of his illness, and ever hopefully looking forward to his recovery, he was misled at this time by some apparent return to health. He had made many notes for a play we had often talked about, the story of which bore some resemblance to the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' and its title was to have been *Faith*. As it was, he even expended such little strength as had come back to him in dictating a comedy destined for the St. James's Theatre, then under the management of Mrs. John Wood. We solved the difficulty by deciding upon a revival of *Ours*, although it was but little more than four years since the play had been produced.

Great pains were bestowed upon the rehearsals, and the play was placed on the stage and dressed, especially with regard to the exactitude of the uniforms, in a more elaborate way than when first acted. Our neighbour, Admiral Inglefield, gave us a valuable bit of realism in a Russian drum captured by himself in the Crimea, and which has figured in all our subsequent performances of the play. Apropos of this cheery friend, we often talked together in mock nautical language 'over the garden wall.' Brimful of good-humour, he would cry out, 'What cheer?' 'Where bound?' to be answered by, 'What time do you splice the main brace?' or 'You were late home last night. We saw you

douse the glims!' Lady Inglefield often laughed at our salt-sea chatter. But to return to *Ours;* one day, while a full-band rehearsal of the second act, where the troops are supposed to be leaving for the Crimea, was in progress and the complete effect given to the scene, we were interrupted by the grief of a poor old servant of the theatre, who was engaged as a 'cleaner,' and at the time was following her daily occupation of brushing and dusting the stall-seats, when she burst into a flood of tears at the remembrance of a sad loss she had sustained by the death of a son at the battle of the Alma.

On one Saturday morning in November—a typical London day—when a cold white fog had penetrated into the theatre, while we were going through the first act, the hall-keeper came to us with a frightened look upon his face, and announced that Mr. Robertson was at the stage-door; we were terror-stricken, knowing him to be in an unfit state to leave his house, even in fine weather. He further sent a message that he dreaded the stairs which led to the stage—there were only four up, and, I think, six down, poor fellow!—and that he would like to drive round to the door then used as the royal entrance, and, if it might be opened, get to us that way. Of course all this was done at once, and, in a piteous plight, Robertson came for the last time among us; many of the company then spoke their last word to him, although it proved not to be his actual final visit to the little theatre he loved so

much and always called 'his home.' He stayed for half an hour in dreadful suffering, and tortured by a cough which told what he endured. In an agony of pain caused by a violent paroxysm, he stooped down and knocked with a hollow sound upon the stage, saying in a voice made terribly painful by its tone of sad reproach, to imaginary phantoms, 'Oh, don't be in such a hurry!' We shuddered at the words, and, when he recovered, with difficulty persuaded him to return home; for he persisted in the thought that the mere sight of the familiar stage would of itself do him good, and hoped yet to come again. The little band that formed our company then grouped together (there was no more work that day), and the talk was only of the visit which none then present will have forgotten.

On Saturday, November 26th, *Ours* was revived with the following cast of characters:

PRINCE PEROVSKY	MR. HARE.
COL. SIR ALEXANDER SHENDRYN	MR. ADDISON.
CAPTAIN SAMPREY	MR. W. HERBERT.
ANGUS MACALISTER	MR. COGHLAN.
HUGH CHALCOT	MR. BANCROFT.
SERGEANT JONES	MR. CHARLES COLLETTE.
LADY SHENDRYN	MISS LE THIERE.
BLANCHE HAYE	MISS FANNY JOSEPHS.
MARY NETLEY	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Mrs. Bancroft.)

It may be interesting to note here that this play, like *Masks and Faces*, was suggested by a picture; Robertson having evolved the plot from thoughts inspired by Millais's magnificent painting, 'The Black Brunswicker.'

Poor Tom insisted upon being present against all advice, and occupied the box which had long been known to us as his. This proved to be the last time he ever entered a theatre. On the following day he wrote this letter:

'6, Eton Road, N.W.,
November 27, 1870.

'MY DEAR MARIE,

'*Ours* was acted so excellently last night that, as I may not see you for the next few days, I write to express the great gratification it gave me to see that the 'light troupe' had distinguished themselves more than ever.

'You know that I am not given to flattery, and that my standard of taste for comedy is somewhat high. I was really *charmed*, and I was very ill the whole night, in discomfort and annoyance. The remark of everyone I heard was, "What wonderfully good acting!" and I was pleased to find Boucicault descanting on it to a chosen few. He said that not only was the general acting of the piece equally admirable, but that he had never—including Paris—seen such refinement and effect combined, as in the performance of the second act. He said, too, that the actors who had played in the piece before acted better than ever. I mention this, because the same thing struck me. Bancroft was most excellent, and I have never seen him succeed in sinking his own identity so much as in the last act. For the first time in my life I felt grateful to the folks on the

stage-side of the footlights, and I am not given to that sort of gratitude.

'It was terribly late last night. If the revival should draw, and it should be worth while, could not the first and third acts be relieved of some ten minutes' talk? Cut wherever you like. *I* shan't wince, for I don't care about either the first or last acts. If they had been less perfectly acted they would have missed fire, and deservedly.

'Yours very sincerely,

'T. W. ROBERTSON.'

No letter in our collection is more valued by us than this one, which was followed by corroboration from another critical pen.

'326, Regent Street, W.,
November 27, 1870.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'Accept my warmest congratulations on the very great improvement in the present performance of *Ours* over the original cast, especially in the part of Chalcot.

'The tone of the whole is elevated, and I entertain no doubt that the play will have a second run. I agree with the remark of the *Observer* of this morning that the dialogue and business of acts one and three might be accelerated.

'I do not think that they dragged, as it says, but the peculiar dislocation which Tom's dialogue encourages inclines an actor to slowdom of delivery.

'Excellent when the laughter intervenes, but not so when the dialogue is not so sparkling as to admit of it. I know you will excuse my criticism, and credit me with the sincere interest which induces me to give an opinion.

'Mrs. Bancroft was herself throughout admirable. Give her my love. She looked good enough to eat, every bit.

'Her dresses were exquisite. .Why do they call the "Roly-poly" farce? It is eminently natural.

'Yours very sincerely,

'DION BOUCICAULT.'

The revival proved an immense success, a success indeed far eclipsing that of its original production. Very shortly after, it being manifest that the play would enjoy a long career, we decided to offer Robertson an increase on the fees we had paid during the original run. To a letter wishing him to agree to this, his reply is appended:

'Wednesday Morning,
December 7, 1870.

'DEAR B.,

'I need not tell you that the death of Fred Younge* has so knocked me over that you must excuse all errors of brusquerie, omission, and commission in this answer to your friendly letter.

* On the previous day, Frederick Younge, the original George D'Alroy, and a very old friend, and once schoolfellow, of Robertson's, who had for some time been the manager of the company engaged to play the Robertson comedies in the provinces, was killed in a railway accident in the North of England.

'Useless to say I am glad to hear *Ours* goes so well and is so successful. May it continue!

'All trouble with my piece at the St. James's is over, and I was "reading up" to write the new play for the Prince of Wales's, which I shall get on to at once.

'Don't be offended that I return your cheque. I recognise your kindness and intention to the full; but having thought the matter over, I cannot reconcile it to my sense of justice and probity to take more than I bargained for. An arrangement is an arrangement, and cannot be played fast and loose with. If a man—say an author—goes in for a certain sum, he must be content with it, and "seek no new;" if he goes in for a share, he must take good and bad luck too. So please let *Ours* be paid for at the sum originally agreed on.

'With kind love to Marie, and many thanks,

'I am,

'Yours always,

'T. W. ROBERTSON.'

The winter was one of unusual severity, and soon afterwards Robertson was sent to Torquay for a few weeks; the weather was equally wretched there, and the journey, added to the mortification of the failure of the last play he ever wrote, called *War*, and which was withdrawn from the St. James's programme after a very few performances, seemed to hasten his end. For a little while he was rarely

able to see his closest friends, among whom at the time were Dion Boucicault, Tom Hood, John Hare, and ourselves.

On Wednesday, the 1st of February, we were fortunate enough to call upon him at a good moment, and he begged to see us. We found him propped up in a big chair, breathing with difficulty. He talked for some little time, dwelling, among other subjects, on the new play he had conceived for us, adding that only earlier in the day he had jotted down some more notes about it. All this we knew could not be, and when we went away we both felt we should never touch his hand again.

A DREAM BY M. E. B.

During Tom Robertson's absence at Frankfort, when he left England to be married, I had a strange dream about him which I related to a mutual friend, who imprudently repeated it to Tom some time afterwards. My dream was this: I saw them being married, and when he was placing the ring upon his bride's finger, I could see that it was lined with black; then I thought, when he left the church, two children came up to Mrs. Robertson with wreaths of *immortelles* in their hands. I quite forgot all about this dream as time went on; but poor Tom, it seemed, did not. On this day when we were leaving him, and we saw too plainly that the sad end was near, he drew me towards him, and said quietly, 'Do you remember your dream about me, Marie? The ring

is getting black, and the wreaths of *immortelles* are made.'

On the night of the Friday following, when the play was over, Dion Boucicault was waiting privately at the theatre to gently break the news to us that quietly and suddenly the end had come that evening.

Never were the oft-quoted words, 'What shadows we are! what shadows we pursue!' more fully realized.

After an early manhood, passed in struggling misery, and sometimes almost want, Robertson was snatched from life when he had only just begun to taste its sweets. His footprints, as it were, upon the shore of fame were quickly placed, but he trod deep enough for even the sands of Time not readily to efface them.

Shortly after this, his two children (by his first marriage) spent the day with us; and as we were walking round the garden, 'Tommy,' who was but a small boy then, seemed to love to dwell upon the sad subject of his father's death, and the little fellow was very pathetic in his boyish remarks. All at once he said, 'A few days before father died, I knew he was going to leave us.' 'How could you know it?' we asked. 'Because he looked so handsome. I have heard that people get such a beautiful look upon their faces when they are going to die.' It seemed as if the son had inherited his father's poetic mind.

Tom Robertson was fond of comparing our conduct with that of other managers towards him in his early days, and would often linger long after the rehearsals were over, giving us painful accounts of his many struggles in life, when, at times, he would express himself with much bitterness. We became the best of friends; our opinions on the art of acting perfectly coincided with his, and the result was, to quote the words of others, 'A new era in dramatic history.' He would constantly speak of our little theatre with gratitude, and called it, as we have already said, his home. There is no doubt that when he wrote for us, his whole heart was in his work, for his best plays were written for that theatre where he never knew failure. As we perfectly understood one another, there was not a single contretemps between us, during a friendship which was broken only by his death. Although his own style was utterly of another kind, Robertson was a great admirer of Sardou, and we recall distinctly his enthusiasm on a return from Paris after seeing *Patrie*, and a like appreciation, at another time, of Meilhac and Halévy's *Frou Frou*. In these plays we have always believed, and but for somewhat Quixotic feelings at the date of their production, as to acting, as long as possible, only English plays, should have ventured on versions of one or both of them.

Some peculiarities, referring especially to his stage life, of so successful and distinguished a writer as Robertson proved to be, may be worth recording.

He always sat in the same box on all first nights of his comedies at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and during their progress rarely looked at the stage, but watched the audience, glancing continually and rapidly from one part of the theatre to another, to gather the different effects the same point or speech might produce on various people, being of course familiar from rehearsal with the actors' treatment; while, between the acts, he would often push his way into parts of the theatre where he would not be recognised, and listen to all the opinions he could overhear. He also made a point of having some one—entirely removed from theatrical life—in each part of the theatre, whom he would see on the following day and hold long conversations with, carefully comparing the impression and the remarks he drew from these different witnesses, generally, he said, with valuable results.

On the night of the funeral we determined to close the theatre; we knew no better way to show our estimate of the loss we sustained. Upon this act the *Times* commented as follows:

'Last night the Prince of Wales's Theatre remained closed as a mark of respect to the memory of the late Mr. T. W. Robertson, whose funeral was appointed for yesterday. We cannot recall to mind any precedent in this capital for so singular a compliment to a dramatic author; but perhaps there never was an instance of a dramatist, who was not

likewise an actor, being so intimately associated with the fortunes of a particular theatre, as Mr. Robertson was with the stage and company governed by Mrs. Bancroft.'

The extract from an account of the ceremony we also feel to be better than any words of ours:

'No better evidence of the high esteem in which the distinguished dramatist, T. W. Robertson, was held, could have been possibly afforded than by the great gathering of his friends assembled yesterday to pay the last sad tribute of personal respect; never, probably, had the peaceful cemetery of Abney Park, Stoke Newington, included within its boundary such a crowd of living personages, whose names were all more or less familiar to the public. The majority of them recalled very different associations from those connected with the sad thoughts now aroused; but it was impossible to mistake the sincerity of expression to be traced in every face. Here was no simulated woe. The heart was full, and the faltering voice and the trickling tear had nothing to do with the artifices of the stage. The many actors and actresses who gathered round the few feet of earth henceforth to be marked as the burial-place of one with whose creations they had been so conspicuously identified needed no prompter to give a cue to the utterance of emotion. Each had a vivid remembrance of some gentle pressure of the hand—some friendly encouragement in a kindly voice spoken—of some generous

written acknowledgment of services rendered. All had enduring recollections of the warm heart and the active brain ever ministering to the social happiness and the intellectual pleasure of those around him; and the oppressive sense of the heavy loss sustained in the sudden stilling of the impulses of both was perhaps most acutely felt by the members of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, with whom the deceased dramatist had been so intimately associated. As a mark of respect—more worthy of note because it is entirely without precedent—Mrs. Bancroft had announced that the theatre would be closed on the evening of the funeral; and throughout the company, all present, from the directress to the humblest official, there was a feeling of personal bereavement manifested in the strongest manner. Mrs. Bancroft was deeply affected, and it was evidently with the greatest difficulty that her emotions could be kept under control.'

At this moment, perchance, the lines of Longfellow came into the minds of many, with the consolatory reflection:

> 'Our life of mortal breath
> Is but a suburb of the life Elysian,
> Whose portal we call Death.'

The plate on the coffin bore the following inscription: 'Thomas William Robertson, born 9th January, 1829; died 3rd February, 1871.'

No one, perhaps, had fewer enemies or more friends than Tom Robertson. He had borne much

ETH.

yes when you find em

Dan: ~~I have [illegible] who's good looks are~~

Polly: to the Lad to come back here to
he.. and that's all.

Georgie: Why didn't she ~~[illegible]~~ write to
my mother?

Polly: Pride and too proud. She said she
didn't [illegible]

---

breaking her heart about anyone
else having it .. it ~~[illegible]~~
her ~~[illegible]~~ took the money he'd
earned with his own wedding -

adversity apparently light-heartedly, and in his prosperity he lost no old friends, while gaining many new ones.

The facsimile of Robertson's handwriting to be found in this book is copied from a page of the original manuscript of *Caste*, by which it may be noted, with some interest, that Esther was first called Ellen Eccles—the name having been changed during the rehearsals.

PERSONAL NOTES ON ROBERTSON BY M. E. B.

Tom Robertson was one of the most sensitive of men, and at the same time terribly sarcastic. I fancy his early troubles soured his nature, and often for the moment blunted his best impulses. Many a time have I walked up and down the stage with him, after a rehearsal was over, listening to stories of his past life. He loved to dwell upon the recollection of them to a sympathetic listener, and would relate his wretched experiences with such bitterness that it often made me feel sorry that he would not take a less jaundiced view of the world, which he said he should like to have 'as a ball at his feet, that he might kick it.'

He was very unforgiving and relentless in his condemnation when he thought he had been slighted or wronged, although he was tender-hearted and very charitable, especially in feeding the hungry, ever ready to sympathize with those who were sick or in trouble of any sort. He would take a strange

delight in saying the most biting, cutting things, to certain of his acquaintances, but would immediately resent any sarcasm if pointed to himself. I have known him writhe under adverse criticism, and fret over it until he became absolutely peevish. I shall never forget the terrible night of the production at the Adelphi of a drama written by him called *The Nightingale.* I was in delicate health at the time, and not acting: Mr. and Mrs. Robertson persuaded me to accompany them to the theatre, and we occupied a stage-box. During the performance Tom came in, and went out, in a restless and nervous state of excitement painful to witness. Not long after the play began, it was evident to me, and also to Mrs. Robertson, that its success was doubtful; but we dared not even hint our fears to Tom, who seemed to be in a sort of dream, expecting loud applause at certain moments, which, however, did not come, and the fact seemed to daze him; he appeared unable to realize that the play was in jeopardy, but the awful pallor of his face told us of his intense and anxious suffering. Failure was imminent, and ominous sounds were heard all over the theatre. Suddenly he would rush in and hurriedly ask, 'How do you think it is going?' with such a scared look that we feared to tell him. I dreaded the end of the play, for its fate was sealed, and wished from my heart that I had not yielded to their persuasions to accompany them. As the last act proceeded, and laughter came where he intended to produce sym-

pathy, and various other signs of ridicule so well known to 'first nighters' were forced upon him, he grew ashy-pale and very silent. When the curtain finally fell, amidst a shower of groans and hisses, he quietly prepared to leave the theatre; but as he left the box, he shook his fist at the audience and muttered between his clenched teeth an imprecation which he did not intend either of us to hear. Oddly enough, although the piece was a deserved failure, Tom never would (at least to his friends) admit that it was not a good play; and he told me himself that he should never forgive the audience of that night. I indeed ought to say so, for I was seriously ill afterwards.

Robertson's personal appearance never seemed to enter much into his thoughts; I don't think the idea of being tidy or untidy occurred to him, for he was a Bohemian to the heart's core. I never saw him act, but I think it is well known, and the admission was frankly made by himself, that he was not 'esteemed a good actor.' He and I never once during the whole of our acquaintance knew what it was to have an angry word. This will always be a happy reflection to me, and I mark the days when we first met with red letters; we were of mutual value to each other, and certainly our good stars were in the ascendant when Tom and I were 'first acquaint.' Dear Tom! there is no one who has a better right than I to place an evergreen upon your memory—for you will never cease to hold your place

in my esteem and gratitude until I myself 'shake off this mortal coil.'

RESUMED BY S. B. B.

It was thought by many that Robertson's death would be a blow to the theatre and its management from which neither could possibly recover, and at the time many such expressions as 'that bubble has burst' reached our ears. We waited very quietly, convinced of the importance of our next step, and resolved, at least, that it should not be a timid one; for the great success of this performance of *Ours* prevented immediate anxiety, and foreshadowed that we had the same friend to fall back upon in *Caste*. Apropos of the fortunate career which followed the revival, a letter from so eminent a man as Mr. Ruskin was naturally delightful to receive.

'Denmark Hill, S.E.,
March 16 1871.

'MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT,

'I cannot refuse myself the indulgence of thanking you for the great pleasure we had at the play on Wednesday last. As regards myself, it is a duty no less than an indulgence to do so, for I get more help in my own work from a good play than from any other kind of thoughtful rest.

'It would not indeed have been of much use to see this one while Mrs. Bancroft could not take part in it; but much as I enjoy her acting and yours, I wish the piece, with its general popular interest, did not depend so entirely upon you two, and, when you

two are resting, on the twins. I was disappointed with Mr. Hare's part; not with his doing of it, but with his having so little to do. However, that was partly my own mistake, for I had a fixed impression on my mind that he was to wear a lovely costume of blue and silver, with ostrich feathers, and, when he was refused, to order all the company to be knouted, and send the heroine to Siberia.

'In spite of his failure in not coming up to my expectations, will you please give him my kind regards? and believe me,

'Yours very gratefully,

'J. RUSKIN.'

At Easter we produced *Cut off with a Shilling*, an admirably written one-act play, by Theyre Smith, the author of those clever pieces, *A Happy Pair* and *Uncle's Will*. It was acted by Miss Carlotta Addison, Mr. Montgomery, and Mr. Collette, and played during this and the next season for more than three hundred times.

We allude here to pleasant dinners given by Henry Chorley, and to which we often went, because at the little house in Eaton Place West we first met many of the celebrities in both the social and the artistic world whom we afterwards knew well. The company was always oddly, but cleverly, assorted, and among the leading names of frequent guests since passed away was that of the late Lord Chief Justice Cockburn, with whom we en-

joyed the privilege of close friendship until his death in 1880. He was a delightful companion, and when he had left his wig and robes in the Queen's Bench, and walked down Whitehall, as was his custom in all weathers, he looked far more like the captain of his own yacht, or a north-country farmer, than a 'wise and upright judge.'

Let us quote Chorley's own cheery words in bidding a guest to one of his dinners: 'I have a dinner here on Gunpowder-day, Sunday, November 5th, half-past seven. I have no choice save to take a Sunday, because I shall receive some of my theatrical friends—Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft and Mr. Hare—and they are free on no other day. If you are disposed to bid for a stall to meet the galaxy (is not that grand?), I will keep one for your disposal, and a bed for yourself and carpet-bag after.'

Chorley's cards of invitation were generally surmounted by a little portrait of himself; and the *menus* were frequently initialed by the side of some quaint dish, after he had written 'Try this.' We have recollections of a wonderful 'fish-pie' which he was very proud of, and of which he would give the receipt to no one. After praising a salad at his house one evening, we received the following; but whether the verses were original we are not able to say:

'Of four good lettuces take the hearts,
They still have got
What man has not;
Break roughly into equal parts.

For hours in water they should lie,
If fairly you'd this salad try.

'One teaspoonful, not chopped too fine,
Tarragon, chervil, and shallot—
Of the two first, proportions even ;
But of the last, as one to seven.
In a large cup the three combine,
And mind you bruise them not :
A pinch of powdered sugar, too,
Black pepper ditto, or say two ;
And in the words of Sydney Smith, lest you this salad spoil,
Be niggard of your vinegar, and lavish of your oil.
Six tablespoonfuls of the first
Will barely quench thy salad's thirst.
Three teaspoons, then, of vinegar must in the mixture vanish ;
But mind, perfection to attain, this latter must be Spanish.
Stir them together, pour them in the bottom of the bowl ;
Then add a teaspoonful of salt, the essence of the whole.
Throw in your lettuce, stir it round, and, if you have a soul,
Stir not the lettuce in its midst, but round and round the bowl,
Using two wooden kitchen spoons that have no other mission.
Your salad's finished, so am I, and so is my commission.'

Owing to the reign of the Commune and the siege of Paris, the entire company of the *Théâtre Français* first came over to England in this year, and acted from May 1st until July 8th, at the Opera Comique Theatre, in the Strand, but only with indifferent success until the last few nights of their engagement. At nearly all the *matinées* which were given on Saturdays we were present. At one of these morning performances, when we were accompanied by the Hares, I especially recall the exquisite acting of Favart and Delaunay in *La nuit d'Octobre*, which greatly impressed us all. For some time we would revert to that performance as being one of the most delicate and artistic we had ever witnessed

on the stage. I have a very happy recollection of a particular evening we spent with Mr. and Mrs. Hare, who were living at that time a short distance only from our house; and it happened that when we or they were not engaged elsewhere on Sunday evenings, we often dined with them, or they with us. On those occasions, Mr. Hare and Mrs. Bancroft would often think of something in the shape of entertainment (as if they had not enough of it during the week) for the amusement of a tiny audience, which frequently consisted of Mrs. Hare and myself only. On one evening they gave an imitation of Favart and Delaunay, which was quite extraordinary; and we regretted that it was not seen and enjoyed by others, for we thought it more than a pity that it should have been lost. In these improvised entertainments, many things were done that would have been a great success with a large audience; but then, perhaps, as is often the case, preparation might have spoiled them. The troupe included then that charming actor, Bressant, who, perhaps, has never been replaced. He always seemed to have far more of that valuable stage quality, *distinction*, called by their critics *autorité*, than is, as a rule, possessed by even the best French exponents of our art.

At the end of their stay, they were fêted at the Crystal Palace, where a big *déjeuner* was given in their honour, and attended by all our leading literary and artistic people of the day. I am reminded

by Sir Frederick Pollock's recollections that I was so fortunate as to have himself and George Du Maurier for neighbours; the chair was taken by Lord Dufferin, who, with Lord Granville and Alfred Wigan, addressed our guests in their own language. The Frenchmen looked strange enough in the daylight, being all clad in evening dress, it having been forgotten to tell them that our customs for morning ceremonies so far differed from theirs.

In the same season, that great singer and charming actor, Mario, left the Lyric stage for ever, and sang for the last time in *La Favorita*. It was impossible for us to be present during the ceremony. All one could do was to rush down to Covent Garden at the end of the play to try to get even one's nose into the vast house, and assist at what was perhaps the most grateful and affectionate demonstration ever bestowed upon a public favourite by his admirers.

As the summer advanced, we had, of course, it is needless to tell, bestowed many anxious thoughts upon the decision as to what should be our next performance. After wading through reams of rubbish, we heard, through Mr. Hare, that Wilkie Collins had written a drama on the subject of his successful novel *Man and Wife*. This we read, and at once agreed to produce it. A letter from the author, which we quote, ratifies the time we came to this decision.

'*August* 1, 1871.

'DEAR MR. BANCROFT,

'Let me assure you that I feel the sincerest gratification that *Man and Wife* has been accepted at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. Every advantage that I could possibly wish for is, I know beforehand, already obtained for my work, now that it has secured the good fortune of addressing itself to the public with Mrs. Bancroft's introduction.

'Believe me,

'Very faithfully yours,

'WILKIE COLLINS.'

So commenced a friendship, which it has been our privilege to enjoy ever since, with one whose masterly romances had lightened many an hour and given us infinite delight; for deep is our debt of gratitude to the creator of Margaret Vanstone, Rachel Verrinder, and Count Fosco. Wilkie Collins might, perhaps, as a novelist, be compared with Sardou as a dramatist: the smallest brick in the structure is intentionally placed, and carries many others; if knocked out, or displaced, serious results would to a certainty ensue to the entire fabric.

We resolved to commence our next campaign with a revival of *Caste*, and to announce the new play by Mr. Collins as its successor. The theatre closed on August 19th, when *Ours* was acted for the two hundred and ninth time of its revival, the success of

which had far exceeded in every way the original production.

Our vacation was again passed at Scarborough, where, among other friends, we had many a pleasant day with the Yateses and the Boucicaults; Sir George Armytage and J. M. Bellew; George Lewis, Clement Scott, and young George Greville —all of whom were holiday-making at the same time. Delightful picnic-drives to Hackness and Forge Valley; the early morning swim in the deep sea from the fishing-smack of a jolly fellow named Webster, when I taught 'Dot' Boucicault, then a plucky little boy of about twelve and clothed in a gray kilt, to take a header, were among the pleasures I look back to.

The only theatrical event to recall during this holiday was the wretched news that came by telegram of poor Walter Montgomery's miserable death: he having shot himself in Stafford Street, off Bond Street, two days after his marriage. A sad end to a life once full of promise, and to a career which might have made more stir in the world. I last saw him, a few weeks before, in the smoking-room of the Garrick Club, when we had a pleasant talk over the days gone by. At the time, although I thought his spirits seemed to have burnt out and found him changed, there was nothing to foreshadow a disordered mind.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEASON OF 1871-72.

ALTHOUGH the great success which had followed the revival of *Ours* made us hopeful that *Caste* would also prove a trump-card, we did not expect the enthusiasm its reproduction met with when we reopened our theatre in September. Five of the seven characters were still in the hands of their original representatives, as old Eccles's two daughters were played as before, Lydia Foote being re-engaged for Esther, and George Honey again joined the company to resume his performance of the bibulous parent; Sam Gerridge and Captain Hawtree also were there to misunderstand and afterwards admire each other's nature; Mr. Coghlan was this time the young love-sick dragoon; and Mrs. Leigh Murray his austere old mother.

Night after night was the theatre crowded, and the comedy received with a delight even warmer than before. In this happy condition we will leave the theatre for the moment to briefly speak of other things, thinking it a fragment of its little history to

note, by the way, that a fresh arrangement then commenced with Mr. James, who from this date drew a fixed weekly sum for his services 'before the curtain,' without participating in the profits.

It was in the early winter of this year that the serious illness of the Prince of Wales from typhoid fever occurred, when the national excitement reached so high a pitch, and the craving for the last news of his condition grew so great, that the bulletins from Sandringham were even read out to the audiences between the acts, or posted up in the lobbies of the theatres for quite ten successive evenings. The National Anthem, and the air, 'God bless the Prince of Wales,' were nightly played by all the orchestras. From about December 7th until the 14th, it will be remembered, the Prince was hardly expected to survive from hour to hour, but from that date more reassuring bulletins were issued, and the relief they caused after the pent-up emotions of all communities is fresh in every English memory. The extraordinary manifestations of loyalty to the throne and personal attachment to his Royal Highness which this illness seemed to set ablaze culminated on the day of General Thanksgiving, when all London was *en fête*, and the Queen went to the service held at St. Paul's. We were fortunate enough to receive tickets from the Lord Chamberlain (who on all great public occasions has for years remembered the theatrical profession, which comes so directly under his control) for the Cathedral, and are not

likely to forget the imposing ceremony, nor the aspect of the building with its splendid *coup d'œil*, greatly aided by the uniforms and decorations of every kind, whose wearers formed so large a part of the vast assemblage.

This mention of Her Majesty's name, and the enthusiasm which greeted her appearance by the side of her convalescent son, reminds me of some lines written by Mrs. Bancroft, on 'The Queen's Seclusion,' a few years after the Prince Consort's death, and I accept the responsibility of dragging the verses from their modest retirement in a little book devoted to such fragments.

'Reproach her not! Let no harsh tongue
With cruel counsel seek
To dash the tear from anguish wrung
That lingers on her cheek.

Reproach her not! Why lift the veil
Of sorrow from her brow?
Why crush love's blossoms as they pale
In grief's cold shadow now?

Reproach her not, that still she weeps
In sad seclusion's gloom,
Still droops for him who darkly sleeps
Death's slumber in the tomb.

Reproach her not! Nor idly deem
The glory of a crown
Should wake her soul from that sweet dream
Of joy for ever flown.

Reproach her not! But, in each breast,
Be this a people's prayer:
God's grace upon the mourner rest
And hallow her despair.'

We note for a moment a dance and supper we gave on a Wednesday in February (1872), because

Henry Chorley was among the guests ; we had sent our old friend a card without the faintest notion of the invitation being accepted, thinking him too ailing and infirm to care for late parties. However, when the night arrived he was announced, greatly to our surprise, in a very cheery mood, and appeared to be in more than his usual health, which for a long time had not been robust. He seemed to thoroughly enjoy his evening, for he stayed through a late supper, and did not leave until the early hours of the Thursday morning. On the following day (Friday), we were greatly shocked to see an announcement of his death placarded in the streets, as the early editions of the evening papers appeared. We drove at once to Eaton Place, aad learnt that he had been found in the morning by his servant in a state of syncope from which he never rallied. Throughout the previous day, and until he went to bed at night, he had been apparently quite well, expecting, indeed, a few of his many friends to dinner on the fatal day. Our last look at him proved that Chorley's love for Dickens was manifested until the end of his life, for by his wish two branches from the fine cedar-trees which grew on the lawn at Gad's Hill were placed on either side of his coffin and buried with him. The King of Terrors robbed us of a valued friend, and the souvenirs so kindly sent us by Mr. Benson Rathbone, his executor, remind us often of the pleasant evenings their former owner gave us.

To return to the little house in Tottenham Street

—which, at the time, was chiefly transformed nightly into 'The Little House in Stangate'—we were on the eve of a crisis in its career, for, successful as the revival of *Caste* had proved, when we neared Easter we began to think it would be wise to withdraw the play while it still had life, and not attempt to force it through the season.

MANAGERIAL AND PERSONAL: S. B. B.

I may here take occasion to remark upon what, in my own estimate of my judgment in management, I have always thought the most valuable quality—*courage*. I mean chiefly with respect to the strength of will necessary to withdraw a play while it was still very remunerative, not only from belief in the attractive powers of its successor, but also that some attraction might be spared to it to allow of its standing one in good stead by increasing the *répertoire* of the theatre, either for revival when ripe enough to be played again, or for use as a stop-gap in the event of disaster, in the shape of a failure, and so to stem the tide of ill-fortune which must have its share in the most favoured theatrical enterprise—a venture which partakes greatly of the character of gambling. For my own part, I found its powers so strong in this respect as to rob me of all desire for that form of excitement in any other way. Shilling 'holes' at four-handed cribbage, or modest points at whist (when I summon courage to exhibit my ignorance of that grand game), always contented me, so far

as cards went; and although I have seen every Derby run since 'Gladiateur' won the Blue Riband in 1865, I never cared to bet. While on this subject I may add that I have heard, and laughed at, rumours (as remote from the truth as many others that have reached me about me and mine) of the large sums I have realized by fortunate dealings on the Stock Exchange, the truth being that the only gambling speculation I ever made proved a conspicuous failure; while I have but a feeble definition to offer of the meaning of 'bulling' or 'bearing,' and the word 'Contango' is as foreign to me as the language of Arabia.

Walls, they say, have ears; were trees endowed with lips, those in our garden and its little orchard in the Grove End Road could reveal many an anxious walk and talk between us two, about the theatre's future, which was, at that time especially, a question full of anxious thought and care.

A very flattering and tempting offer had reached us to take our entire company, and act the Robertson comedies through the United States. As this would have been the first series of complete English performances given in America, I think it may be inferred, remembering the reputation of our management at the time, that success was a foregone conclusion, while the chances in favour of the engagement being exceptionally brilliant were very great. A scheme of this magnitude, of course, required to be dealt with a long time in advance, and

I think it was in the early spring that I persuaded Mrs. Bancroft to try and overcome her terror of the sea, and consent that we should entertain the extremely liberal proposition that had been made to us.

With the view of seeing if the arrangement could be entered into for the autumn of the following year, I commenced negotiations, and settled with Mr. English, the dramatic agent of Garrick Street, and formerly Sothern's business manager, to go with us to America in that capacity should the matter be decided. One day, after many details had been arranged and certain salaries fixed, I was in his private office busily engaged in settling further questions, when our conversation was interrupted by the whistle of the speaking-tube which communicated with the room of his partner, Mr. Blackmore. English applied the pipe to his ear, and received this information through it: 'Knowing all about the matter you are discussing with Mr. Bancroft, I interrupt you to say that Craven Robertson is now with me, anxious to arrange a visit to America with *Caste*, and the other plays, as soon as possible.' Needless to say that this message fell like a bomb-shell into an enemy's camp, and suspended our proceedings. Mr. Craven Robertson was the brother of the author, and then had the control of the comedies. Had he visited America a year before us, we might very likely have shared the fate of John Reeve, so long the great favourite at the Adelphi, who, when he went there many years ago,

was condemned as 'A barefaced imitation of Burton:' an inferior actor who had won his American reputation by trading on a direct reproduction of Reeve's mannerisms and peculiarities. Our friend Toole afterwards suffered in that country from much the same cause—many of his plays having been acted before his arrival, with his own 'gags' and 'business' slavishly imitated.

Our proposed visit to the States being interfered with in the way I have told, we eventually determined, after long and well-weighed consideration, that the first successor to the Robertson comedies should be a production of Lord Lytton's *Money;* being helped to our decision by the remembrance that if we met with failure, we should still have *Man and Wife*, with the advantage of its being a new play, to fall back upon. We explained our views to Wilkie Collins, who at once, and in the kindest way, acquiesced in them.

A further step towards success was taken, Mrs. Bancroft being contented then to play the small part of Georgina Vesey, while I resigned Captain Dudley Smooth—but not without a pang, I confess, for it had been a favourite part of mine in the country—and undertook the not slight task of trying to invent still another type of 'dandy,' and bestow whatever might result from the effort on the character of Sir Frederick Blount.

While dilating on so unworthy a subject as myself, I may as well make a clean breast of matters, and

say that much of my professional conduct has been guided—however faintly I may at times have laid their text to heart, and however frequently I may have failed to profit by them—by some words I once read which were applied to a distinguished actor of the last century: 'By his impartial management of the stage and the affability of his temper he merited the respect and esteem of all within the theatre and the applause of those without.'

No one knows my backslidings so well as I do—no one regrets them with the same keenness; but if, since the days when, as a very young man, I first bore the weight and responsibility of ruling others, I have in the main obeyed my maxim, it is all that can be asked of poor humanity; for the occasions when I have failed to follow it, I hope I have been forgiven.

Let me add that Mrs. Bancroft from the beginning placed perfect confidence in my judgment, not only with regard to the business-side of our work, but in the choice of plays, and accepted my opinion in nearly all important matters, even when, unfortunately, it chanced to be at variance with her own. Whenever I was at fault, the least I have to say is that she stood more firmly than ever by my side, and never allowed her faith in me to be shaken by an occasional mistake. Indeed, I can most truly add that throughout our managerial career she was in all matters my strongest help, ever modest in success, ever full of courage to meet a reverse, and ever faithful in sorrow or in joy. She also shared the

belief with me that considerations as to what parts we should play ourselves were never to bias our judgment in the refusal or acceptance of plays. In this spirit Mrs. Bancroft cheerfully sank her own importance as an actress on many occasions, and frequently to some detriment, through long runs, of her position before the public; playing, for instance, Georgina Vesey in *Money*, and subsequently Blanche Lundie in *Man and Wife;* Pert in *London Assurance;* Lady Henry Fairfax in *Diplomacy;* Lady Walker in *Odette;* Olga in *Fedora;* and Miss Maplebeck in *Lords and Commons*—being content, for the good of the theatre and its management, to engage in her own company, often cheerfully playing second parts to them, Madame Modjeska, Miss Ellen Terry, Mrs. John Wood, Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Bernard-Beere, and Mrs. Kendal.

It seems to me that this simple record best speaks the utter absence from her nature of such a feeling as professional jealousy. The value of such self-abnegation I cannot over-estimate, as without it we should never have produced some of our most successful plays.

In this book, to which she contributes so important a share, Mrs. Bancroft would not, I think, like me to say more, but it is a subject on which it would be impossible for me to say less.

Many head-shakings and ominous forebodings followed the bold announcement of our intended

performance of Lord Lytton's comedy, *Money;* some of our best friends thought the step a mad one, and that certain failure awaited the temerity of our attack upon what had grown to be known as a 'standard work.' We may perhaps add that, apart from its original production by Macready (who described the part of Evelyn as a bad one), the comedy was called unlucky, and one that had persistently belied its name.

We decided how we would cast the play, and went to work upon it for six or seven weeks, with the conviction always facing us that we were playing for the highest stake we had risked up to that time, but buoyed up with the feeling that success would break our trammels by allowing our choice of plays a much wider range in the future.

In the course of our rehearsals we applied to the author to be allowed to make a few alterations in his play, chiefly with a view to avoiding a change of scene, and received the following response:

'DEAR SIR,

'I am obliged for your courteous letter, and have no wish to make frivolous objections to your performance of my comedy. If it suits your convenience to play Act IV. without change of scene between one room and another in Evelyn's house, so be it; only let me first see how you would modify lines.

'It is not a few verbal cuts here and there on

which I should think it worth while to cavil with a management so accomplished and so skilled as yours.

'Yours truly,

'LYTTON.'

Justified by the courteous sympathy received from Lord Lytton during interviews on the general treatment of his work, we rehearsed with renewed vigour, bestowing the greatest pains upon the most elaborate interiors of rooms we had as yet shown, and an exact reproduction of a card-room in a West-End club, the members of which were represented by young fellows who wished to go upon the stage: some of whom, we are delighted to add, have since made their mark as actors.

So as to give the production the chance of being acted during the height of the London season, we withdrew *Caste* after adding two hundred to its number of representations; and Lord Lytton, greatly to our satisfaction, expressed his wish to be present at our first performance of his work, which took place on Saturday, May 4, 1872.

We printed the following old saying on the play-bill:

'"Tis a very good world we live in,
To lend, or to spend, or to give in;
But to beg, or to borrow, or get a man's own,
'Tis the very worst world that ever was known.'

The characters in *Money* were cast as follows:

LORD GLOSSMORE - - -	MR. C. COLLETTE.
SIR JOHN VESEY, BART. - -	MR. HARE.
SIR FREDERICK BLOUNT, BART. -	MR. BANCROFT.
CAPTAIN DUDLEY SMOOTH - -	MR. ARCHER. (His first appearance in London.)

MR. GRAVES	MR. GEORGE HONEY.
MR. STOUT	MR. F. DEWAR.
ALFRED EVELYN	MR. COGHLAN.
MR. SHARP	MR. E. DYAS.
AN OLD MEMBER OF THE CLUB	MR. F. GLOVER.
FRANTZ	MR. HERBERT.
TABOURET	MR. CAMPBELL.
MAC FINCH	MR. DENISON.
CRIMSON	MR. ELWOOD.
PATENT	MR. ROBINSON.
TOKE	MR. FRANKS.
LADY FRANKLIN	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.
GEORGINA VESEY	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Mrs. Bancroft.)
CLARA DOUGLAS	MISS FANNY BROUGH.

The actor who gained most by this production was certainly Mr. Coghlan, whose fine performance distinctly advanced his reputation: he was then, with his handsome presence, a perfect Alfred Evelyn. Mr. Archer also made a distinct hit, on his introduction to the London stage, by his rendering of 'Deadly' Smooth.

The success of the comedy was very great, and the critics were unanimous in warm praise of the production. A few lines from a journal not given to excessive praise shall precede by way of preface a letter from the distinguished author of the play:

'From the current blemishes of English acting the Prince of Wales's company is to a great extent free. No attempt is made by any one of its members to eclipse his fellows, or to monopolize either the space on the boards, or the attention of the audience. No piece is presented in such a state of unpreparedness that the first dozen performances are no better than rehearsals; no slovenliness in the less impor-

tant accessories of the play is permitted. A nearer approach accordingly than elsewhere in England can be found to that *ensemble* it is the boast of the Comédie Française to encourage, is witnessed. Actors are measured, so to speak, by their parts, and are only to take such as fit them. Mrs. Bancroft herself, with an artistic feeling to be expected from her, accepts a subordinate character. The example she sets is followed, and, as a result, the performance takes the town with a sort of wonder.' —*Athenæum*, May 18, 1872.

'12, Grosvenor Square,
May 10, 1872.

'DEAR MADAM,

'Our mutual friend, Mrs. Lehmann, I trust conveyed to you my high appreciation of the remarkable skill and ability with which the comedy of *Money* has been placed on your stage. But I feel that I ought to thank you, in words not addressed through another, for the gratification afforded me on Saturday last.

'Had the play been written by a stranger to me, I should have enjoyed extremely such excellent acting; an enjoyment necessarily heightened to an author whose conceptions the acting embodied and adorned.

'Truly and obliged,

'LYTTON.

'To Mrs. Bancroft.'

Mrs. Frederick Lehmann, who was one of the party in the author's box, soon afterwards included

us in a charming dinner-party at the Woodlands, when the guests invited comprised Lord Lytton, the Lord Chief Justice, and Wilkie Collins. It was at that time we first saw the then freshly-painted portrait of Nina Lehmann (now Lady Campbell), a picture of lovely childhood which would alone immortalize the brush of Sir John Millais.

The enthusiasm the production provoked, and the great demand to see it, soon convinced us that we should have to stop the run of the play to fulfil engagements we had entered into some months before to go down to Manchester at the end of July for a fortnight, and then to Liverpool for three weeks, to give a few performances there of *Caste* and *School;* otherwise *Money* might safely have been played throughout the summer, had we been inclined to abandon our holiday. This, however, we never did, and resolved again to let things take their course, trusting to the attraction of Lord Lytton's comedy being firm enough to stand the break, and earn a fresh career when we reopened our theatre in the autumn.

The increase of fame and managerial reputation which followed on the success of this production, the most ambitious we had yet attempted, added, indirectly, largely to our circle of friends in the artistic and literary worlds, and brought us many social pleasures. The early summer passed happily away, and the season, which was with one exception (that in which we produced *School*) the most successful

we yet had known, came to a close, perforce, on July 27th.

The next day we journeyed down to Manchester, or rather to Alderley Edge, a few miles away, where, at an excellent hotel, we lived for the fortnight we were acting at the Prince's Theatre; Mr. Hare and Mr. Coghlan also did the same. In their company the days were pleasantly passed, while the evenings were cheered by the enthusiasm of Manchester play-goers, which is well known to all good actors who have been there. Staying in this way in the country necessitated our going to and fro by train, and the compartment on our return journey was often partly occupied by visitors to the theatre who had just seen the play, and who, in their ignorance of our identity with Hawtree and Polly Eccles, or Jack Poyntz and Naomi Tighe, amused us immensely by the frank interchange of their impressions of those and the other personages. It is easy to recall now Hare's comic change of countenance when the doings of Sam Gerridge were openly discussed in his presence.

We then went on to visit our well-tried friends in Liverpool, who seemed as glad to see us, and welcomed us as warmly as before. Hare and Coghlan also had lodgings there, in the same house as ourselves; a proof that we had not quarrelled very much. One day during our stay we all arranged to have a country drive, and walked to some livery stables in the neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant to order a

carriage. On our arrival we could not find a creature; the yard seemed quite deserted, and we concluded that all the vehicles must be out on hire for some special occasion, for there was not even a gig to be seen anywhere. We rang the ostler's bell, but no one answered the summons, so there we stood, among the empty coach-houses and loose boxes, with silence everywhere around, not knowing what to do. We were on the point of leaving, when Hare remarked that the loose boxes, with their upright bars, half-way from the top, looked very like wild beasts' cages, and, as he said this, went into one of them. He closed the door after him, and immediately proceeded to give an imitation of a caged lion. He walked up and down, close to the bars, peering through them exactly like some wild animal in the Zoo, showing his teeth and making hideous noises. The imitation was very funny, and, encouraged by our amusement, Hare continued his performance, prowling, peering, and snarling, quite innocent of the tardy arrival of a great, hulking ostler-fellow, who was standing gaping at him like a country chawbacon, with his eyes and mouth wide open. Suddenly Hare caught sight of the man, and at once tried to make a rapid exit; but the door of the impromptu cage would not open, and there stood the highly-amused yokel, enjoying the fun which had been accidentally provided for him, while poor Hare became more and more furious at being caught, as he afterwards said, 'making a fool

of himself to a grinning idiot,' without being able to get away. At last the man extricated him, and Hare left the place as quickly as his legs would take him, the ostler looking after him still with an empty grin upon his face, evidently thinking him some harmless lunatic, or the clown from a neighbouring circus. The whole affair was so ludicrous, the situation so extremely comic, that we all laughed until we felt perfectly ill. In fact, as we followed Hare's retreating and indignant figure down the street, we laughed till the people stood and gazed, and must have thought us mad as well.

Our engagement ended on Saturday, August 31st, and at the close of it, it so chanced that our old friend Edmund Yates arrived in Liverpool, bound on his journey for fame and fortune in America. His last hours in England were spent with us, and, of course, we saw him off. We accompanied him on the tug, and went with him on board the Cunard ship *Cuba*, remaining until the last signal to leave for shore was given, and introduced him to a friend of ours, who was going to be a fellow-passenger to New York. This gentleman had a peculiar facial expression, which gave him the appearance of a swollen cheek after severe toothache, and which made one eye look as if it were always winking. After a last 'Good-bye,' we left them; and, as we steamed away, they both stood watching us. Edmund Yates looked so sad and thoughtful, and there was such a solemn look upon his face, as he waved his adieux, that, by

way of cheering him at the last moment, it was impossible for Mrs. Bancroft to resist the temptation (while our friend looked another way) of giving a facial imitation of his peculiarity. This had the desired effect on Yates; for he went off into a fit of genuine, hearty laughter, and has often said since that he shall never forget the incident, as it put his thoughts into a happier groove, and did him good. So our oblivious friend, who was none the worse for it, contributed innocently to this change of feeling.

This proved, from then till now, our last visit to other cities, for as our work grew harder, our holiday became more precious after the strain of a long London season; so that, not wilfully, but always with regret, we have year by year refused the tempting offers that have come to us from the great provincial towns, and, maybe, it will only be to say good-bye professionally that we shall ever go to some of them again.

A BACHELOR HOLIDAY.

This was the last year of the German gaming-tables, and never having seen them, I resolved upon a hurried run abroad. I had so short a time at my disposal that the rapid travelling would have been too hard for Mrs. Bancroft, and I invited my friend Coghlan to go with me, who was throughout the trip a delightful companion and knew the Continent well. After acting in Liverpool on the Saturday, we caught the night mail and travelled up to London, leaving the docks

at noon on Sunday, September 1st, by the old *Baron Osy* for Antwerp.

After a good and well-earned night's rest, I woke in the waters of the Scheldt. As we neared Antwerp I stood at daybreak on the deck, gazing at the lace-like tower of its beautiful cathedral, when suddenly the biggest of its bells quite startled me by powerfully telling out the hour of six, which was followed by such a merry peal from its smaller brethren, that it almost sounded like laughter at the solemnity of their companion. We only stayed a few hours in the quaint old city, but of them made good use—although with terribly crazy speed; I remember especially how strange the little milk-carts looked as they were drawn about the streets by dogs. We then took the train to Brussels, and arrived in time for *déjeuner* at the Belle Vue, where, I recollect, we met Sir Henry de Bathe—surely one of the handsomest men who ever stepped. The day was passed in 'doing' the city *à l'Américaine*. Hot weather and heavy travelling told upon us both, for we nearly fell asleep in our stalls at the Park Theatre in the evening. I really only run through this account of our brief bachelor holiday, of which I never kept a note, to tell where we went, and how many glimpses we had of things and places, in a fortnight, not with any ridiculous idea of having seen them properly. The next day we went by train to Cologne, arriving in time to see the great Dom and many of the city's sights, including part of a German play. On the

Wednesday morning, after an early swim in its rapid waters, we started up the Rhine by steamer and greatly enjoyed this lazy day, the whole experience being new to me. How delightful was this first experience of its castles, its legends, and its villages dotted about among the vineyards on the hills, each looking, in the distance, very like a box of eighteen-penny German toys, and sixpence extra for the church. We landed in the evening at Biebrich, and then drove on to Wiesbaden, arriving there in time to see the last half-hour's play at the tables, which struck me as rather a *bourgeois* five-franc sort of business. We looked in upon the play again in the morning, and, after a charming walk about the pretty neighbourhood, took train for Homburg, where we found the play much higher and apparently a far more serious matter. Several remarkable 'punters,' who had spent not only their money but their lives at the 'Board of Green Cloth,' were pointed out to us, some of whom had strange and awful faces, looking, indeed, akin to hungry birds of prey. On the Kursaal Terrace we were so lucky as to meet, among other friends, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mathews, and, later on, passed part of a merry evening at their rooms in Ferdinand Strasse. In the morning we went on to Baden Baden, pausing for a brief stay at Frankfort, where we drove through the interesting old Judengasse, which was not then demolished. In the afternoon we reached our destination just in time, I recollect, to see the return from the races,

which then were on. We stopped at the Hôtel de Russie, and resolved to remain two days there, the first time we had yet done so in any place since we started. This allowed us to see something of the gaiety, as it was the height of the Baden season; to visit the Alte Schloss, endeared to me by *Play*, and often to watch the tables or to sit outside the rooms and listen to the music of Strauss's splendid band, which played his lovely valses, conducted by himself, and in a way that recalled the fact of my having seen Jullien in my youth, when he led concerted music at the Surrey Gardens. We then found that in six days we had seen so much, and, having still a full week before us, we decided, after a fearful combat with Bædecker and Murray, upon a rapid peep at Switzerland. At the station, where we took train to Bâle, I remember being much amused by a young English girl, who recognised me, quoting my catch-word in *Money*, 'I don't see what harm it can do me,' in answer to some remark made by one of her companions. In the evening, when we arrived at the old Trois Rois, I recollect reading of the death of 'Billy' Sams, which had occurred a few days before at Folkestone.

I pause for a moment to wonder if anyone will remember who 'Billy' Sams was. Well, William Raymond Sams was a theatrical librarian. He lived at the corner of St. James's Street and Pall Mall, although really having the air of a man whose home was more likely to be at White's or Arthur's. Every-

body knew him in those days, and everybody liked him. He was quite a character, and more like a 'buck' of former times, with his wonderful snuff-boxes, his 'clouded cane,' his long fur coat, and his old-world, courtly ways. He rejoiced in telling stories of Louis Napoleon, to whom, in his exile, he had shown services which were afterwards most graciously remembered at the Tuileries; and, more than all this, he was a warm-hearted and charitable man.

We left Bâle by the very early morning train for Lucerne. Oh! what a scramble it all was—but how enjoyable then—just catching the boat for Fluellen, and breakfasting on deck, not to lose the beauties of the lake. We then drove up the grand St. Gothard Pass—the first I ever crossed—as far as Andermatt, where we stayed the night—not a bad day's travelling. At Göschenen we passed the opening of the great tunnel, which had just been begun that year, and I had my first view of the weird and rugged grandeur of the Devil's Bridge, with its never-ceasing roar of falling waters, as the shades of evening fell—a change indeed, in four-and-twenty hours, from the linden-trees of Baden. The magnet of the mountains proved very strong with me, for every year since I have felt myself drawn irresistibly towards them. In the morning, very early again, we started by diligence over the Furka Pass, where, at the little inn on its summit, is framed the page of the visitors' book which con-

tains the Queen's signature as 'Countess of Kent.' Then we surged down the zigzags to the Rhone Glacier Inn, driving on afterwards to Brieg, where we arrived at nightfall after a fourteen hours' varied journey.

The next day was an easy one, spent in loitering away the morning, for we only went to Martigny; and a desolate, depressing halting-place I thought it. The railway was not open then all the way, and we had to go there partly by road. After a good night's rest we walked, on a broiling hot day, over the Tête Noir to Chamounix; being followed by a truck which, drawn by a mule, carried our luggage. The little vehicle also served to carry a good deal more of our clothing, for the heat grew so intense that, on our way, we imitated the amusing performer in the circus, who strips off one article of clothing after another, until prudence compels him to stop. I remember, also, as we rested for a little while after luncheon, trying to sleep on some logs of wood outside the inn, when Coghlan, with brutal enjoyment, knowing my terror of reptiles, destroyed my hopes of slumber by suggesting that I had chosen a spot which looked like the home of snakes.

The weather was absolutely perfect, but almost tropical. We were met at every turn by glorious views, culminating in the superb Mont Blanc range and its wonderful glaciers and Aiguilles as approached by Argentière.

In all my life I think I can safely say I have never

felt so tired as on that night. I almost feel the pain when I think of what I suffered as we went up never-ending stairs at Chamounix to the double-bedded room which was all the accommodation a crowded hotel could give us. We both nearly fell asleep over dinner, and I recall, distinctly, my one anxiety when we went to bed was to leave Coghlan the responsibility of putting out the lights.

Our stay was very brief, for we were obliged to hurry on to Geneva. There we put up at the Hôtel de la Paix, and in the evening went to the play. On the next day we learnt by the firing of guns and a festive display of bunting that the *Alabama* claims had just been settled, the Conference having been held at Geneva. I found that England's representative—Lord Chief Justice Cockburn—was staying at the Hôtel des Bergues; so I lost no time in calling upon him. What a wonderful voice that man was gifted with! The sound of it still lingers plainly in my memory. The circumstance reminds me of a characteristic letter Mrs. Bancroft had received from the Lord Chief just before he started on this mission, and which may fairly have its place here:

'40, Hertford Street, Mayfair,
Tuesday.

'DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'I should be delighted to dine with you, as you so kindly wish; but, alas! I am just leaving for Geneva. Your note makes me wish the *Alabama*

had gone to the bottom of the sea the day she was launched!

'In utmost haste,

'Very truly yours,

'A. E. COCKBURN.'

I recall an evening also when the Lord Chief dined with us, the late Mr. Critchett being among our guests, who, before we went down to dinner, asked to be introduced to Sir Alexander. Mrs. Bancroft did so in these words: 'Will you allow me, dear Chief, to present to you Mr. Critchett, the celebrated oculist? As Justice is blind, you may find him a most useful man.' To which Sir Alexander replied, in his genial and courtly manner, 'If, when you first lift the film from my eyes, you will permit me to gaze on Mrs. Bancroft, I shall thank you, sir.'

This rush through Switzerland had only occupied six days; at the end of them we took the afternoon express to Paris, travelling in the same compartment as Mr. Evarts, the distinguished American diplomatist, fresh from his Alabama victory, and early on Sunday morning—barely a fortnight after leaving London—we were at the Grand Hotel. This was the year following the Commune and the siege of Paris, so that many of the hideous marks left by them on the fair city's face were still plainly visible. We saw much that could be seen in eight-and-forty hours, including a performance of *L'Aventurière* at

the Français by Madame Arnould-Plessy, not long before that once fine actress left the stage.

We were home again on Tuesday, September 17th, Baden-Baden and Paris being the only places since we left in which we had slept two nights. This was the first time I had ever been further abroad than Paris, and the trip was only marred by the regret that my wife had not been with me; however, I resolved that I would retrace much of the ground in her companionship in the following year, for the early gaze, hurried though it was, at things and places then so strange, but which since have grown familiar, had left a deep and distinct impression on my mind, in spite of the different countries we visited, the various sights we saw, and the many miles we travelled in those sixteen days, which to me seemed more like sixty.

A RIVERSIDE EPISODE, BY MRS. BANCROFT.

While my husband was tearing, in the hurried way he has described, over the Continent, I was at peace in my sister's cottage by the beautiful Thames, and will tell a little story of a homely woman who lived not far from it, and to whom my sister had shown some kindnesses.

One day I looked in at a small sweet-stuff shop she kept, and where I had often been before, but not to eat the acid-drops or bull's-eyes which graced the tiny window in a single row of greenish glass-bottles, and which had lost their freshness of colour, and stuck together as if to keep one another warm.

They looked sickly, pale, and withered up, and very far from being in their first youth; the sun of many summers had faded them, and the chills of many winters had shrivelled them. I made my way to the cramped sitting-room, which served as kitchen, dining-room, and nursery, where I was greeted by several little voices, some laughing, some crying. There was the mistress of the house holding a baby at her breast with one hand, and combing the hair of an older baby with the other, while the rest of the progeny were scattered about the room. One was playing with a doll all bruises and cracks, which looked weary of being tossed and dropped, clad in a scrap of faded red cotton, and its remnant of hair hanging by a thread. One eye had disappeared, and the other had a wild, mad stare, as much as to say, 'A little more of this, and I must shriek!' A boy, to whom a handkerchief would have been a comfort, was seated at the window with a slate which he would scrape with a pencil held in a perpendicular position, making my teeth feel as if I had been eating lemons all day. The poor woman appeared rather unamiable, and I asked her how she was. She replied, 'Oh, mum, I'm as well as can be expected, but I'm worrited a good deal! You can't drag up a family loik this 'ere without being worrited, you know, and I'm worrited more than most folks, leastways as I knows on.' 'I am sorry to hear this,' I replied; 'a family is always an anxiety, but then there is not one of them that you would like to lose.' 'Lord

forbid, mum, say I ! I love 'em all ; but I can't 'elp being a bit anxious, and I shows it in my face, I dare say. But my 'usband is the most inconsider-estist man I knows. Last night he comes 'ome at six o'clock for 'is tea. I'd done a hard day's washin', and I was that tired, mum, I could 'ardly 'old up my 'ead. Well, he comes in, sits him down, and begins his tea ; then, quite sudden, he looks at me and he says, " Why, missus, ye're a lively one, I *don't* think ! I comes 'ome tired from work, and want to see yer 'appy. Why, yer looks as if yer 'ad lost 'arf-a-crown and found a button. Why don't yer larf ?" " Larf !" I says, " larf ! It's all very well for you to talk ; while ye're at work in the fields, you 'ave yer pals to talk to, and to eat yer bit o' dinner with, and yer 'ave the clear air to enjoy it all in. Here am I stuck at 'ome with six brats wot's a-fightin' and squallin' all day long. *What's there to larf at in that ?* I 'ave a babby to nuss, what's that weak as the doctor says I ought to drink porter, and where is it to come from ? as I can't sell a single acid-drop, 'cos the parents says they be bad for the teeth, and there the blessed things stick in them bottles a starin' at me till I'm sick o' the sight o' 'em. *What's there to larf at in that ?* There's Liza in bed with measles, and she 'as to be watched noight and day, and fed on sulphur to draw it out on the surfice, so I don't get no sleep. *What's there to larf at in that ?* Then there's Johnny with his 'ead that bad, wot's brought on by the School

teachers a-crammin' verses into it. The doctor says that the lad'll 'ave absence on the brain, and wake some morning a stark hidiot. *What's there to larf at in that?* I looks in the glass, and I can see myself a-getting older and uglier every day. *What's there to larf at in that?*"'

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEASON OF 1872-73.

On Saturday, September 21st, the theatre was re-opened, when our performance of *Money* was resumed, the only change in the cast being the substitution of Miss Lydia Foote, who rejoined the company, for Miss Brough, as Clara Douglas. The old comedy, notwithstanding the considerable break that had occurred in its run, again stood our friend, and proved that its career was by no means over, for it continued to attract fine audiences throughout the autumn and the early winter.

Satisfactory as this state of things was to the treasury, it was not to the advantage of this then unthought-of book. There not being consequently many events of great moment concerning ourselves to write about, we may be allowed a short pause to refer briefly to other events of interest, at least in our theatrical world, which happened about this time.

On October 29th, a great actress of years gone by—the once famous Miss O'Neil, afterwards Lady Becher—passed quietly away at the age of eighty,

fifty-two years after her retirement from the stage. The announcement of her death, in fact, came as a surprise to many, who little thought a contemporary of John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons at the close of their careers, and one who had acted in her youth the companion parts with Edmund Kean when he first electrified the town by his genius, had lingered until then upon the scene.

Miss O'Neil was the daughter of a country actor, and passed her early life upon the stage. She excelled in tragic parts, and, beyond question, was a highly gifted actress. Hazlitt denies her the power of beauty, to the influence of which, he asserts, she owed but little. Her fame and fortune were quickly earned, for she only acted in London some three or four seasons; so great, however, was her popularity, that she is said to have made even the unapproachable Siddons gently murmur at 'the inconstancy of the public.' All that we can personally relate of this light of other days is, that when quite an old lady she asked to be taken to see the portrait of herself which now adorns the staircase of the Garrick Club. As she stood in front of this full-length representation of herself in years gone by, after quietly gazing upon it for some little time, she burst into a flood of tears.

Another death occurred soon afterwards, which robbed America of her most powerful tragedian, Edwin Forrest, who must at one time have worthily been numbered among the mighty actors. He will

be, perhaps, best remembered in this country as the rival of Macready: so fiercely did the tide of jealousy flow, indeed, as to be the cause of the serious riots at the Astor House, New York, when Macready last acted there; for which, justice compels the statement, the impetuous and strongly democratic temperament of the eminent American actor was, in the main, responsible. Forrest destroyed his reputation very much by lingering too long upon the stage, a fault very common, it would seem, in our profession.

Early in the new year, on January 18th, the eminent author of the play we were still acting died at Torquay after a short illness. Indeed, it was only a few days before that his son, Mr. Robert Lytton (now the Earl and Ambassador to France), who had been for some time abroad, did us the honour to seek our acquaintance, inclosing a letter of introduction from Lord Lytton. This led to a long talk about our production of *Money*, which 'Owen Meredith' arranged to see on the evening following our conversation, and just before his summons to his father's death-bed.

We had remained in frequent communication with Lord Lytton, and only a very short time before the unexpected close of his life received the following interesting letter from Knebworth:

'DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'Pray excuse the liberty I take in this note. A lady of my acquaintance has a daughter about the

age of thirteen, who has conceived a strong predilection for the stage, and seems, from what I hear, to give promise of qualifications likely to achieve success in that profession. I have ventured to advise the lady, before she either thwarts or encourages her daughter's inclinations, to give the child a few lessons in elocution and the rudiments of the actor's art, by some experienced teacher who will candidly say, after a short trial of the pupil's natural gifts whether they *do* justify the choice of a profession in which young persons are so apt to suppose that they must have a talent for that which they have only a fancy for.

'Will you kindly inform me if you know of any such teacher, whose frank opinion of the pupil's chance of success as an actress could be fairly relied upon?

'Though a child of thirteen is very young to raise the question as to her future profession, yet I have a strong belief that one who has a real genius for the stage shows it very early; and if this child has not such genius it would be more easy to divert her mind from the idea now than it might be later.

'With repeated apologies for the trouble I give you, for which my only excuse is that I know no one whose opinion and advice on such a subject I would so readily take,

'Believe me,

'Your obliged servant,

'LYTTON.'

It may be of some interest to state that on looking back at the receipts of the theatre, we find that for about a week immediately after Lord Lytton's death they increased.

To turn to happier subjects, we give the reader the words of a characteristic letter received at this time from the delightful comedian, and now old friend, Charles Mathews, to whose hospitality we owed many happy evenings:

'Nice,
January 19, 1873.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'It is hard to be obliged to come indoors on such a heavenly day to write a letter on business, and you will no doubt think it harder to be obliged to read it. But friendship calls, and I sacrifice myself upon its altar. Do thou likewise.

'A very nice fellow, Captain ——, now in the far west of America, has written a comedy. ("O Lord!" I hear you say.) It is peculiar and strictly military. Now, all I ask of you is to read it, have the parts copied out and produce it, playing, of course, the principal part yourself—nothing more. Your new piece, of course, will not run more than two or three years, and then you will have this ready to fall back upon. The human mind naturally looks forward, and managers cannot make their arrangements too soon. If by any unforeseen, though most improbable, chance you may not fancy the piece (such things have happened), please drop me

a sweet little note, so charmingly worded that the unhappy author may swallow the gilded pill without difficulty. There is something in the piece, or I would not inflict it upon you. If well dressed, and carefully put upon the stage, it *might* be effective.

'This is what is called writing just *one line*. You will of course say it "wants cutting," like the piece. So I will cut it—short.

'With kind regards,
'Faithfully yours,
'C. J. MATHEWS.

'On reading this rigmarole, I find I have only used the word "piece" four times. When you give my letter to the copyist, you can make the following alterations:

'For "piece" (No. 1) read "play."
,, ,, (No. 2) ,, "production."
,, ,, (No. 3) ,, "work."
,, ,, (No. 4) ,, "comedy."'

We may mention that in the early days of the Prince of Wales's management we constantly received manuscripts, written by aspiring dramatists, of every sort and kind of play—tragedies, comedies, farces, and burlesques—all accompanied by letters from the anxious authors, containing a sentence to this effect: 'I am emboldened to send you my play, as Mr. Charles Mathews assures me in a letter that, in his opinion, it is exactly suited in every way to the Prince of Wales's Theatre.' We eventually found

means to retaliate upon the comedian for his amiable practical joke.

Meanwhile, we had asked Wilkie Collins to read his long-postponed *Man and Wife* to the company. This he did with great effect and nervous force, giving all concerned a clear insight into his view of the characters; and, indeed, acting the old Scotch waiter with rare ability to roars of laughter. We felt the play required certain alteration which could best be made after some rehearsals, and also were impressed with the necessity to do all that was possible to deserve a success in our first new piece since the Robertson comedies; so we decided, towards this end, to aid the cast to the utmost of our power by Mrs. Bancroft agreeing to play Blanche Lundie, a bright, pretty part, but quite of a secondary order, and by Mr. Bancroft offering to appear as the doctor, an important minor *rôle* confined to a dozen sentences.

It may, perhaps, be as well to state here, that the first act of the play was written, and the entire drama planned, before the novel was commenced; this, we think, has been the case with more than one of Wilkie Collins's works, and in this instance may account for the absence from his drama of *Man and Wife* of a character rendered so important in the story—that of Hester Dethridge, the dumb cook.

We bestowed great pains upon the rehearsals, often having the benefit of the author's presence and assistance, which, when the play was well advanced,

proved of real service; he also, in the kindest way, fell in with our views and altered the second act of his play (in which the stage was originally intended to be divided into two rooms—the parlour of the inn at Craig Fernie, and the adjoining pantry of old Bishopriggs) in accordance with our suggestions, and greatly, as he generously admitted, to the advantage of its representation. In this scene we went to unusual pains to realize a storm, and I think electric lightning was then first used, as was also an effect we introduced of moving clouds.

The run of *Money* reached more than two hundred performances, far eclipsing all previous records of that comedy, and having served the exchequer to a greater extent than any of our productions up to that date, excepting only *School*. *Man and Wife* was then acted, for the first time, in the presence of the most brilliant audience, so far as names then known throughout the world in every art and calling went, the theatre had as yet seen assembled within its limited walls. The list would now be but a sad record—so many of them have gone away to the 'Silent Land.'

ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1873, WILL BE PLAYED

MAN AND WIFE,

A Dramatic Story in Four Acts, written by Wilkie Collins.

SIR PATRICK LUNDIE - - - -	MR. HARE.
GEOFFREY DELAMAYN - - - -	MR. COGHLAN.
ARNOLD BRINKWORTH - - - -	MR. HERBERT.

MR. SPEEDWELL	MR. BANCROFT.
MR. MOY	MR. COLLETTE.
BISHOPRIGGS	MR. DEWAR.
DUNCAN	MR. FRANKS.
LADY LUNDIE	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.
BLANCHE LUNDIE	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Mrs. Bancroft.)
ANNE SILVESTER	MISS LYDIA FOOTE.
MISTRESS INCHBARE	MISS LEE.

NOTE BY S. B. B.

Wilkie Collins passed almost all the evening in my dressing-room in a state of nervous terror painful to behold, and which I could not have endured but for the smallness of the part I had to play: the author's sufferings were assuaged occasionally by loud bursts of applause, which, fortunately, were just within ear-shot. Only for one brief moment did he see the stage that night, until he was summoned by the brilliant audience to show himself, and to receive their plaudits at the end of the play. Ever modest, ever generous, he largely attributed his success to the acting, and was loud in his admiration, at the final rehearsals, especially of Hare and Coghlan, Miss Foote, and Mrs. Bancroft. I take the opportunity of this note to add that the character I acted did not appear until the middle of the third act of *Man and Wife*, which gave me frequent opportunities at this time of seeing Desclée, who was then fulfilling an engagement at the Princess's Theatre, in early portions of some of her great parts. The impression left on my memory is that she was one of the best and truest actresses who ever adorned the art I follow.

We give a few sentences written by that distinguished critic, Dutton Cook, on the subject of this drama:

'In preparing a stage version of his novel, *Man and Wife*, Mr. Collins has successfully accomplished the end he had in view, and has proved himself to be a dramatist of unusual ability. His play is no confused transfer to the stage of selected scraps and scenes which the spectator has to connect and digest as best he may, with such help as he can derive from his memory of the book, but a complete and coherent work, endowed with an independent vitality of its own, and perfectly intelligible to those among the audience unsupplied with previous information upon the subject. The story, though still retaining a certain repellent element, which could scarcely, indeed, be altogether suppressed, is set forth with lucid art, while the author does not relinquish his impeachment of amateur gladiators, and the eccentricities of the law of marriage.

'*Man and Wife* is not to be classed among the pleasant plays which have hitherto been the staple entertainments of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, in which wit and sentiment have been dexterously combined, and sketches of the quieter scenes of social life have been cleverly presented. Mr. Collins's play is a production of a more forcible if more gloomy character, with a tendency towards melodrama and a severely tragical catastrophe. Its

real interest, however, and the skill with which it is constructed and represented, will probably secure for it a popularity of some endurance. It is well and tersely written, the earlier dialogues being especially noteworthy for their point and vivacity. The play had been diligently rehearsed, and the performance exemplified the conscientious care and good taste which have invariably characterized this management.'

A country tour of the play was soon started, Charles Wyndham being engaged for the part of Geoffrey Delamayn, and Miss Ada Dyas for that of Anne Silvester, who acted with great *éclat* in all the leading provincial theatres. The other principal parts were admirably played by H. B. Conway—his first engagement under our management—Charles Collette, and Miss Blanche Wilton (Mrs. Collette).

Man and Wife was a favourite play with the royal family; the Prince of Wales saw it twice, and the Princess three times, between the 25th of February and the 4th of March, and again before its withdrawal on July 12th, being then accompanied by the Cesarewitch and Cesarevna of Russia.

The favour thus shown to this production on one occasion caused, indirectly, the plot of a little domestic drama.

The royal box was made by throwing two ordinary private boxes into one, and on a certain Friday night news reached the theatre that it was required

for the following evening. The official in charge at the time found that both boxes had been taken—one at the theatre, the other at a librarian's in Bond Street—and that, in fact, nothing remained unlet but a small box on the top tier. Anxious, however, not to disappoint the Prince of Wales, it was decided that every effort should be made in the morning to arrange matters. The box which had been sold at the theatre was kindly given up by the purchaser, and a visit to Bond Street fortunately disclosed the name of the possessor of the other, for it had been let to a regular customer of the librarian; who represented the purchaser as a very agreeable man, who might be induced to either accept the little box on the upper tier, or to go to another theatre instead. The gentleman was a stock-broker, so a messenger was at once sent to his office in the City; when he arrived the man was told by a clerk that his master had just left—Saturday not being a busy day. After a great deal of difficulty, and through representing his errand as of the greatest importance, our invincible messenger succeeded in learning the private address, which was some miles distant, of the possessor of this coveted private box; so away he went, as fast as a hansom would take him, to the suburban residence of the hunted stock-broker, where, on his arrival, the door was opened by a maid-servant. 'Is Mr. —— at home?' 'No, sir.' 'When will he be?' 'Can't say, sir.' 'Won't he be home to lunch?' 'No, sir; master went to

Liverpool on business this morning, and won't be back till Monday.'

The door of a room leading from the hall was opened at this moment, and a portly lady appeared upon the scene.

'Went to Liverpool!' echoed the messenger. 'Nonsense; he's going to the Prince of Wales's Theatre this evening, and I've been sent to see if it's possible to exchange the box the gentleman has taken, through some of the royal family coming and wanting it.'

The portly lady now approached, and asked if she could be of any service. The messenger repeated his story, and again explained his errand. The lady smiled blandly, and said that if the small box on the upper tier was reserved, matters would no doubt be amicably arranged in the evening, if her husband, Mr. ——, was going to the theatre, so the man went away rejoicing.

At night, not long before the play began, the gentleman, who had in vain been sought so urgently, arrived in high spirits, accompanied by a very handsome lady; the attendants were eagerly on the watch for the presentation of his ticket, on which, of course, was the number of the wanted box, and our manager was in readiness to explain the circumstances, and to beg acceptance of the box reserved instead of it. The gentleman fully bore out the character given him for good-nature, and very kindly agreed to put up with the alteration.

There ended our share in the transaction, but hardly were the unfortunate man and his handsome companion left alone than the portly lady from the suburban residence reached the theatre, and asked to be shown to 'the private box that had been reserved for Mr. ——, in place of the one he had given up that evening by request, as she wished to join the party.' The lady was at once conducted there; the door was opened. Tableau! What explanation was given as to the business-trip to Liverpool we never knew, or whether the third act of this domestic drama was rehearsed later before Sir James Hannen.

Although the production did not achieve the same length of run as some of its predecessors, the receipts for the first sixty or eighty performances were on a par with previous successes. After a time a summer of unusual heat affected the theatres, and in June the fêtes of many kinds given in honour of the Shah of Persia were also detrimental to them.

It is impossible to allow the death of Macready to pass without notice in this book. The great actor of a former generation, who for years had been living very quietly at Cheltenham, died there on April 27th, soon after the completion of his eightieth year. He had retired from the stage in 1851 in the height of his great powers, and is one of the strongest instances of a celebrated actor having resisted every temptation which was offered to him to return to it. His funeral at Kensal Green, on May 4th, attracted an enormous

crowd, many old actors who had once been members of his company being present, some of them being thought long since dead. On reading the tablet belonging to his catacomb one could not fail to be struck by the frequent sorrows that had befallen him, and to reflect how much they might be responsible for the constant and reiterated regrets which so abound in Sir Frederick Pollock's interesting book of the tragedian's reminiscences. Much that was beautiful in the character of the great actor may be learnt from a little volume called 'Macready as I Knew Him,' written a few years ago by Lady Pollock.

For a long time his health had been enfeebled, and his last visits to London were to place himself under the care of Sir Henry Thompson. He finally visited a theatre on one of these occasions, when he yielded, although then very infirm, to the persuasions of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins to go with them to see Fechter play his own old part of Claude Melnotte in the *Lady of Lyons*. Macready sat in silence nearly all the evening, and when the curtain fell he merely muttered, 'Very pretty music!' It is dangerous to tell anecdotes of any known actors of the past, lest they should before have been in print, which doubtless is the case with a story told to us years ago by one of the past generation of tragedians. Macready was playing *Hamlet* in a country theatre, and during rehearsals had so severely found fault with the actor, a local favourite, who took the part of the King, that his Majesty determined at night to

be revenged upon the great man by reeling, when stabbed by Hamlet, to the centre of the stage (instead of remaining at the back), and falling dead upon the very spot Macready had reserved for his own final acting before he expired in Horatio's arms. Macready groaned and grunted, 'Die further up the stage, sir.' 'What are you doing down here, sir?' 'Get up and die elsewhere, sir,' when, to the amazement of the audience, the King sat bolt upright upon the stage, and said, 'Look here, Mr. Macready, you had your way at rehearsal, but *I'm king now, and I shall die where I please!*'

Another little anecdote told sometimes of other tragedians, but which really happened to Macready, may be worth repeating. He depended very much in Virginius—one of his finest parts—upon a very subordinate actor's emphasis and delivery of a certain line. At rehearsal on one occasion he was very patient, and repeated the words, as he wished them spoken, over and over again to the young actor, who, in vain, tried to catch the tone of his instructor. At last Macready said, 'Surely, man, it's easy enough —can't you speak the words as I do?' 'No, sir, I can't,' was the actor's reply, 'or I might be in your position instead of earning only thirty shillings a week.'

AN ADVENTURE BY MR. BANCROFT.

I will turn from these memories of a great actor of the past to tell a story concerning chiefly two actors of the day—Hare and myself.

A little club, known as the 'Lambs,' which had a

short life but a merry one, flourished at this time. Its members were limited to twelve original 'Lambs,' and twelve subsequently elected 'Lambkins.' Among the founders and first members were John Hare, Douglas (now Mr. Justice) Straight, Charles Collette, Talbot Smith, Captain Heathorn, Lord Newry (now Earl of Kilmorey), H. J. Tufton (now Lord Hothfield), H. J. Montague, Frederick Jameson, and myself. Comyns Carr, Arthur Blunt, Seymour Trower, Montagu Williams, and, I think, Corney Grain, also joined 'The Fold,' in which I can recall many a delightful meeting; our number at table, by the way, being constantly fated to be thirteen, an accident which I can vouch for not being followed by the frequently expected superstitious consequences.

It was an annual custom to have a special Sunday dinner in June, which was called 'The Washing,' and was held at Maidenhead. Those who could spare the time went down to Skindle's on Saturday and remained till Monday; the actor members generally joined the others on Sundays, in time for the pleasant boating party of the afternoon.

This year Hare and myself resolved to take the midnight train from Paddington to Maidenhead, there to have supper and be ready for an entire happy day in the morning. We started with this intention, in spite of a downpour of rain. When we reached Slough we thought the train was detained a long while at the station, and asked a porter why we didn't go on to Maidenhead.

'Maidenhead, sir? why, you're in the slip carriage for Windsor.' 'Windsor!' said I. 'Windsor!' echoed Hare. 'Yes, gentlemen; Windsor. Will you go on there, or get out here? Look sharp, gentlemen, please.'

We had hardly a moment to decide between sleeping at the White Hart, or finding a fly to take us on at once to Maidenhead; but settled on the latter, and bundled out of the railway-carriage with our handbags and wraps on to the Slough platform. It was now one a.m., and the rain simply came down in sheets. Almost as if by magic the lamps were extinguished, leaving the whole place in darkness, and we got little comfort from a sleepy porter as to the chance of a fly—even he vanished directly the station was shut up, and we found ourselves in a sorry plight. Every effort to rouse anyone at the neighbouring houses proved fruitless, the only answer to the noises we made being their echoes and the barkings of disturbed watch-dogs. The rain was far too heavy for our umbrellas to be of their proper use, so we shouldered our well-laden Gladstone bags upon the handles of them, and resolved to tramp to our destination, if we could but find the way, which, luckily, Hare hoped he could remember. Our trials were aggravated by the want of food, for we had relied upon a good supper at Maidenhead, and by the state of the weather; there was no moon, and the unceasing downpour made it impossible to light a cigar or pipe. We started with

spirits at a low ebb, and were often ankle-deep in water as we walked along. After trudging about a mile perhaps, we reached what looked in the darkness like a roadside ale-house. We hammered at the door and shouted to be let in. Presently from a bedroom window, instead of being offered the hospitality we hoped to purchase, we were threatened in violent language, made still more offensive by a strong Berkshire dialect, with the contents of a double-barrelled gun, if we didn't at once move on. Nothing would convince the wretch that we weren't tramps on our way to Ascot, it being but a day or two before the race meeting.

At this juncture Hare groaned piteously, and I just caught an expression on his face, which so strangely mingled with his bedraggled and mud-bespattered appearance, that, for the life of me, I couldn't resist regarding the whole adventure from the comic side, and burst out laughing. Hare's groans increased: the words may be little to repeat, but the tone in which he rebuked me lives plainly in my remembrance, as he said, 'Oh, Bancroft! don't laugh; don't exhaust yourself; don't risk more than a few cheering words to help us bear this!' I really grew a little alarmed soon afterwards, for the awful weather culminated in a thunderstorm, and we were very uncertain of our way, upon which we met no other travellers.

We reached, just as the dawn was breaking, a cross-road with, happily, a tall finger-post to direct

our choice, of which we stood in need, for Hare's remembrance of the way forsook him. Although the rain had now somewhat abated, I was helpless, through my short sight. Eventually Hare climbed on to my back, and, after many struggles with fusees and matches, read what the sign-post had to tell us, the remaining distance proving to be less than we had thought. Spurred by this intelligence, and finding ourselves on the right road, able also at last to light our pipes, we proceeded more cheerfully, being now certain of our route, and at last reached Skindle's Hotel, very like water-rats, ravenously hungry, horribly tired, and heartily glad to get rid of the weight of our luggage. The next difficulty was, how to obtain an entrance. In sheer desperation we fixed haphazard on a window at which to throw pebbles, and by great good luck had hit upon the bedroom of Mr. Skindle himself, who then personally managed the hotel. After speaking to us from the window, he soon came down and let us in, telling us how we had been given up after the last train arrived without us. We declined to move a yard beyond the entrance-hall by way of a dressing-room, but got out some flannels, and left our saturated boots and clothes on the bench that stood there. We then worried, like wolves, the food that our host kindly fetched from the larder, and afterwards, fortified with brandies and sodas, crawled upstairs to a double-bedded room; a very happy termination to our dread, an hour or two before, of being benighted.

We laughed as heartily as our companions the next morning over our adventure, and soon forgot the damp side of it.

For the sake of recording a clever retort, I may recall a custom at the weekly meeting of the club, to which its members were restricted, when the 'Shepherd' of the evening, as the chairman was called, had to make one speech, and was at liberty to demand a reply from any 'lamb' or 'lambkin' present. On one occasion, when Montague was President, his evil star led him in his speech to chaff, in rather a merciless fashion, a new recruit to the fold, Comyns Carr, whose power of ready response was not then so well known as now, but was never more clearly shown than in his reply, one sentence of which, I remember, described his assailant as 'A pantaloon without his maturity, and a clown without his colour!' Montague's face at this unexpected retort was a study. Poor fellow, when shortly afterwards he went to America, he there founded a club under the old name, which existed until lately, and, I believe, still flourishes, in New York.

Having now broken the spell, as it were, and proved that we could be successful in plays widely different from those which first made the reputation of our management, we thought we might commence our next season with a revival of *School*, hoping for a success from it that would at least last long enough for us to find another new work.

In July, we wrote to Wilkie Collins to say that his play would exhaust its attraction by the end of the season, and must then be withdrawn. This was his answer to the letter :

'90, Gloucester Place,
Portman Square, W.,
July 17, 1873.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'Thank you heartily for your kind letter. I should be the most ungrateful man living if the result of *Man and Wife* did not far more than merely "satisfy" me. My play has been magnificently acted, everybody concerned in it has treated me with the greatest kindness, and you and Mrs. Bancroft have laid me under obligations to your sympathy and friendship for which I cannot sufficiently thank you. The least I can do, if all goes well, is to write for the Prince of Wales's Theatre again, and next time to give you and Mrs. Bancroft parts that will be a little more worthy of you.

'Ever yours,

'WILKIE COLLINS.'

The season closed on Friday, August 1st, *Man and Wife* having been acted one hundred and thirty-six times.

On the following Monday we commenced an engagement we had entered into to produce *Caste* for four weeks at the Standard Theatre, in Shoreditch, having definitely arranged only to appear ourselves for the first twelve nights, as we would not shorten a

longed-for holiday which we intended to spend abroad. It was a great experiment to act this delicate comedy in so vast a theatre and before an East-end audience, and we were a little in doubt as to the result; any fears we entertained were soon dispelled, for densely-packed audiences nightly received the play with great enthusiasm, appreciating fully its most tender scenes, and listening with rapt attention even to the chronicles of Froissart which the old Marquise relates to her son. After a fortnight our parts were taken by Miss Augusta Wilton and Mr. Denison, and the remaining performances were thoroughly successful.

The following brief extract from a long article on this engagement bears directly on the way the new audience received the comedy: 'Apart from the perfection of play and players, that East-end theatre was a sight worth going far to see when the play was *Caste*, and the players the Prince of Wales's company. From basement to ceiling within its vast area gathered night after night an interested, intelligent, enthusiastic audience; the cold though confirmed approval of the Prince of Wales's audience was replaced by storms of impulsive applause. It made one think Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, wise as they are, err but in one respect—that of playing ordinarily in too small a theatre for the attractions they offer and the amazing popularity they command.'

Our first trip together abroad was a very happy one, and, in the time we were able to spare for it,

we saw a great deal, and remembered much; although we committed the error, so common with young tourists, of trying to see more than time and strength will properly allow. Every church of interest, every gallery of pictures, every collection of art treasures, that our path crossed, was hurried through in turn; while, of course, each waterfall must be looked at, each cave explored—all with a confusing speed that a little experience cures when one begins to learn the value in all ways of repose. A brief itinerary of where we went, and what we did, in the four weeks at our disposal, will give a bare idea of the first Continental scamper we enjoyed together.

We first halted at Brussels, squeezing a rapid rush at its many beauties into six-and-thirty hours (not forgetting to see the horrible pictures in the Wiertz collection). At Cologne, on our first visit together to its magnificent Cathedral, we were fortunate to arrive just in time to witness the impressive and picturesque sight of a military funeral. After a short day at Bonn, where we came in for a musical fête in honour of which the picturesque old town was prettily decorated, we went up the Rhine by boat to Mayence. Among our fellow-passengers on the steamer, who had been engaged professionally the day before, were Madame Schumann (whose acquaintance we were proud to make later on at Signor Piatti's charming villa on the Lake of Como), and the distinguished German singer, Marie Wilt. During the *table d'hôte* dinner, which

was served in the saloon, we learnt, through a little note which was sent across the table by an English friend, that 'Marie Wilt' and 'Marie Wilton' were seated side by side.

We stayed some days at beautiful Heidelburg, to thoroughly see the grand old Schloss and its romantic neighbourhood, and also rested for awhile at Baden Baden. The gaming-tables had now vanished, and our amusement took the milder form of drives to Eberstein and in the magnificent Black Forest. This rapid journey through parts of Germany was followed by the same rate of speed in Switzerland. We certainly stayed for breathing time at the Schweizerhof (prince of hotels) at Lucerne, and of course, from there, made the inevitable excursion up the Rigi; there was only one small inn upon the summit then, and the railway, which we ascended in a thunderstorm, was still a thing to marvel at. No need to tell that we 'did' the mountain in the usual way: we saw the sun set, and were lucky in a wondrous view; less so in the morning, when we were roused at some unearthly hour by the hideous uproar of an Alpine horn, to see the rising. However, the whole experience was new and delightful then, and we descended to the lake thoroughly pleased, and soon crossed the Brunig to the Giesbach Falls, where we remember first meeting Mr. (now Sir) John Gorst. There the custom then prevailed at the hotel—growing, one cannot help regretting, more and more un-

common—of being waited on by Swiss maid servants, dressed in the quaint costumes of their different cantons. Of course we saw at night the illuminations of the fine cascade by Bengal lights, which seemed, we thought, a kind of Cremorne-like desecration. [Always fond of swimming, I (S. B. B.) rarely in those days was near a lake or river without indulging a wish to bathe; and I remember distinctly the icy cold water of the Lake of Brienz, which is almost wholly fed by the glaciers, and the warning of the boatman to keep quite close to him.] At Interlaken we stopped for three days, making pretty excursions in its charming neighbourhood, and listening at Lauterbrunnen, for the first time, to the roar of avalanches, which were falling rapidly that season, from the three great peaks—the splendid *Jungfrau* and her two guardians, the *Aïger* and the *Mönch*.

From Interlaken, where the heat was very great, we went by Thun to Berne, paying hurried visits to the bear-pit, and the funny old performing clock (a description of which, years afterwards, 'Lady Henry Fairfax' turned to good account in *Diplomacy*), and heard the organ played; well worth it, but far behind, we thought, the wonderful instruments at Lucerne and Freiberg. Thence we went to the Lake of Geneva, staying at the Beau Rivage on the shore of Ouchy; there again we rested awhile, making a pilgrimage to the Villa Beausite on the outskirts of Lausanne, where John Kemble lived after his retire-

ment from the stage in 1817, and was buried in 1823. With great difficulty we discovered the last resting-place of 'the noblest Roman of them all,' which is in the strangers' quarter of a now unused cemetery on the high road to Berne, some two miles from the town. When at last we found a sexton to unlock the rusty gates, we searched for the vault. The stone was sadly neglected, and the enclosed grave choked with weeds. These, by our direction, were soon cleaned away, making the grave look trim and neat, and we left some flowers in their stead, a small tribute to the memory of a great man. A few years later we went there again, and then found the grave in perfect order, some member of the Kemble family having, doubtless, come to know of its neglected state.

From the shores of the beautiful lake, we went to Martigny, having a great wish to see the monastery of St. Bernard; the journey through the squalid villages and passes on the way, especially Orsières—looking like places that had been sacked during times of warfare, and left so—was disappointing, and our first impression of the aspect of things at our journey's end rather a disillusion, neither monks nor *hospice* being, in a picturesque sense, 'all our fancy painted them.'

An incident of this uphill journey we hesitate to record, because it was to us, and will be thought by those who read it, a disgrace to humanity. We were followed on our way by a small open carriage, which was drawn by two pretty little Arab ponies,

and driven by a man (?) who was accompanied by two young girls. The little vehicle and the almost exhausted but willing animals, we afterwards heard, had been bought outright, and were being cruelly driven day after day by this man, his halts being chiefly for his own refreshment only. All who have mounted to the top of the Great St. Bernard will remember the labour of getting there; even the strong native horses are spared by their humane masters when they are mounting the steep slopes, but this creature knew not the word *spare*, and whipped the tiny Arabs all the way When we arrived at the canteen, just before the difficult path to the hospice begins, we left our carriage (?), and mounted mules or walked. It will hardly be believed that this merciless owner of a human shape made the worn-out and already half-dead ponies struggle over the rude, rough path, which was fit only for the sure-footed mules. It was a pitiful sight to watch the strained sinews and the look of despair of these poor beasts; but remonstrances with the inferior animal who drove them were in vain: the reply received was, 'They are my horses; I shall do as I please. I don't care if they do die. I've got here now, and I mean to get back to-morrow; then they may die if they like.' We refrain from revealing the man's nationality, but are glad to say he was not an Englishman.

Let us turn from this brutal experience and tell how, on our arrival at the hospice, we were most

kindly received by a young monk: the climate is too severe for old men to stay there any length of time. We arrived, it so happened, on a fast-day; so our fare was frugal, though ample. Soon after we were safely housed, at the end of a hard journey, two medical students whom we had passed, already looking fagged, on the road, and who had walked all the way from Chamounix, arrived so tired and foot-sore that one of the young fellows fainted as he reached the door, when the kindness shown to him by the monks was beautiful to see.

We passed a pleasant evening, and found the old visitors' books very interesting, as were some of the gifts to the monastery, especially the little piano presented by the Prince of Wales in remembrance of his visit some years before, which, owing doubtless to the altitude, had sadly lost its tone.

The sleeping accommodation was simple but clean, and we were roused early enough in the morning by the bell for matins. In the sharp, crisp air we had a lovely walk round the lake at the top of the pass, being accompanied by some of the famous dogs. We admired the fine brutes all the more after visiting the Morgue and hearing stories of their rescues of many a poor traveller from a shroud of snow. Before we left, we had a wretched example, much commoner than one could believe, we were told, of the parsimony of a visitor with regard to the alms-box—the only method of acknowledgment accepted by the poor monks for the hospitality so generously shown to all

comers; the owner of the little Arab horses, in spite of a pointed reference in his presence to what was at least hoped for—if not expected—from tourists, took his departure without depositing a single coin!

After a hearty breakfast and all sorts of kind wishes from our self-sacrificing hosts, we started on our journey back to Martigny, and on the following day went—oh, in such a vehicle! the builder of which forgot the springs, and the little road was barely made—over the Tête Noir to Chamounix. There again we halted, in gorgeous weather, for some days, devoting them to the usual experiences of a first visit to the beautiful valley so loved by Albert Smith, and where in its pretty church we read the tablet to his memory. Who will not guess that we went, by the Montanvert, over the Mer de Glace, and crossed the Mauvais Pas; then made excursions on the Glacier des Bossons; in fact, did everything to impress ourselves with the belief that we were already distinguished mountaineers?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEASON OF 1873-74.

BEGUN BY MR. BANCROFT.

AT the commencement of this season, a house in Pitt Street, of which we had obtained a lease, was made to communicate with the theatre, and added greatly to its convenience, but not without a wrench to both of us in obliterating old memories: the former green-room, associated with so many recollections—including the readings of the Robertson comedies—was gone for ever, forming, for the future, part of a much-needed scene-dock; while Mrs. Bancroft's dressing-room, which adjoined it, with its musical remembrance of the old stage-door keeper, was abolished, and had become a property-room. On the other hand, the advantages included valuable additions to our number of rooms, and a new royal box and approaches, with much-increased comfort.

Although *School* had only been originally produced in 1869, and ran for full fifteen months, when we revived the comedy, in addition to ourselves, Mr. Hare and Mr. Glover alone remained to appear

in their original parts. This was the cast as we acted the play on Saturday, September 20th, 1873: Lord Beaufoy, Mr. Coghlan; Dr. Sutcliffe, Mr. Collette; Beau Farintosh, Mr. Hare; Jack Poyntz, Mr. Bancroft; Mr. Krux, Mr. Glover; Mrs. Sutcliffe, Mrs. Leigh Murray; Naomi Tighe, Miss Marie Wilton (Mrs. Bancroft); Bella, Miss Fanny Josephs.

The immediate and pronounced success of the revival left our minds at ease for a time, and until we should decide upon a performance to succeed it.

Mr. Wilton's health had for some time been a subject of concern with all his family, and, as the winter approached, his condition grew alarming. On November 26th he died, and was laid at rest a few days afterwards in Norwood Cemetery. It may be mentioned here, that just outside the chapel at this very time, his daughters, by accident, came across a vault, under the shadow of a weeping willow, belonging to his only surviving brother, who now lies in it, and who had expressed his sorrow at not having been made aware of Mr. Wilton's condition, that he might have gone to him: so, although in life they had been parted for many years, in death only a few yards of earth divide them. The world indeed is small!

> 'A sleep without dreams,
> After a rough day of toil,
> Is what we covet most.'

An odd practical joke was played upon me during the early part of the season. As to who was the

author of it I never obtained the smallest clue, although it was very much in Sothern's line.

One night when I reached the theatre, the hall-porter, who was for many years in our service, followed me to my dressing-room, and told me, in a nervous sort of way, that a package had arrived for me early that evening by Parcels Delivery, adding, 'I don't like the look of it, sir!' Then, continuing mysteriously, 'And more than that, sir, I don't like the feel of it!' 'Don't like the feel of it? What do you mean?' 'Well, sir, it's unpleasant—very unpleasant—to the touch, and I think there's been something alive inside the parcel. I only speak to warn you, sir, because, if you opened it unawares, it might give you a fright!' 'What on earth do you mean?' I said, getting a little bewildered by the earnest manner of my informant. 'Run down and fetch the parcel, and we'll very soon see the contents.'

The mysterious package was brought up. It was covered with thick brown paper, properly directed, bore the official label of the 'L. P. D. C.,' and was marked '8d. to pay.'

Directly I touched the package I shared the hall-porter's belief, and my thoughts turned first towards the gift of a harmless sucking-pig; his, I fancy, took a more serious direction. Carefully on our guard, we cut the string, and, after removing a quantity of brown paper, disclosed the body of a dead *ape!* The beast, although it had evidently only been dead a

very short time, was horrible to look at, and certainly, but for the friendly warning I had received, would have alarmed me.

What to do with the wretched brute was my next thought. Charles Collette was a member of our company at the time, and I sent him a message asking if he would come to my room. When I explained the case, I told him that I did not mean to let the practical joke end with me, nor to waste the animal, but should pass it on to some one else. He at once entered into that view of the matter, and after a little thought we fixed on a young actor in the theatre, who had not yet arrived, to be that some one else. Of course the hall-keeper was in the secret, and we had the animal carefully packed up again, washed off the label, and attached it to the fresh covering.

When our victim arrived, he was asked for the eightpence, and then had the parcel sent to his room. Soon there was a wild shriek, and of course Collette and I rushed upstairs to see what was the matter.

After all sorts of cogitations, the poor monkey was left that night in the cellar of the theatre; and, as otherwise no further fun seemed likely to arise from it, we concocted a long letter in French, as though written by a distinguished foreign naturalist, who had by an unfortunate blunder sent the ape to a wrong address, and requested its recipient to be so kind as to re-address the 'rare and very valuable

specimen,' to 'Monsieur ——, at ——'s Hotel, *to be called for.*' All these wishes were carefully and promptly obeyed, and, unfortunately, I have no better end to my story. How long the mysterious parcel remained at the hotel before the 'rare and very valuable specimen' it contained too powerfully asserted its presence, I never knew, and, it may be easily guessed, I never inquired.

On the boxing-day of this year, a dinner-party was given by Charles Mathews, to celebrate his seventieth birthday. After my work, among other friends of 'Everybody's friend,' I went to Belgrave Road, and found the chief object of the festivity still seated in a chair, decorated with garlands of choice flowers, at the largest round table I ever saw in my life. He looked so radiant and well, that when I went up to him and said 'Many happy returns of the day, young Mathews!' to be answered with 'Many thanks, old Bancroft, come and sit down,' it seemed incredible to believe him to be nearly forty years my senior. We had a delightful evening, and it was long before the staircase was deserted. This staircase, as was the case with his former house in Pelham Crescent, it will be well remembered, was rendered remarkable by being covered with drawings of himself in all his early characters. This valuable and unique collection of portraits was subsequently, after the death of Mathews, bought and presented to the Garrick Club by a popular member who has ever been a great lover of the stage, and

who has contributed more than one good play to its literature.

As the old year ended so pleasantly, we will begin the record of its successor by a letter from a dear friend, whose society, for very many years, has been a charm to all privileged to enjoy it.

'32, Weymouth Street, Portland Place,
January 2, 1874.

'MY DEAR MRS. BANCROFT,

'It was very like you sending me that pretty little New Year's note.

'I thought I should like to give myself a treat in 1874, and so went to see you. "Time has not touched your infinite variety;" I laughed and cried as I have done before.

'Your note will be placed in my book of letters. I think you shall be put between Dr. Parr and Lord Brougham—no, Naomi Tighe shall be next Lord Byron and Shelley; Jack next, mind. My regards to Mr. Bancroft.

'Yours,

'ANNE B. PROCTER.'

School pursued its prosperous course, and seemed to have almost an enchanted life. Of all its author's works it certainly was the most generally popular; but as the winter approached we felt it would be wrong to try its strength by forcing the revival too far into the season. All we had to fall back upon in the shape of a new play was a charming little

piece we had accepted from W. S. Gilbert, under the provisional title of the *White Willow* (which afterwards developed, as will be told, into *Sweethearts*). This we felt would be a most valuable addition to a contemplated revival of *Society*; but we also felt that to again follow Robertson with Robertson would be worse than bad management; so we decided, supported by the remembrance of the success achieved by *Money*, and the importance to the theatre of finding a new part for Mrs. Bancroft of greater value than Georgina Vesey and Blanche Lundie, to go still further to the classics, and venture upon a production of Sheridan's masterpiece, the *School for Scandal*, with a view to presenting the grand old comedy as an exact picture of its period.

The first steps towards this ambition were long and careful visits to both the Print and Reading Rooms in the British Museum, and equally valuable pilgrimages to Knole: this lovely seat I visited in the companionship of Mr. George Gordon, our scenic artist, there to choose such types of rooms as, from their wealth of pictures and old furniture, might serve the purpose best. Months before the date of its production we were at work upon the details of the play. It was impossible to hope for an ideal cast of such a comedy, or to expect that all the members of a company occupied for years almost entirely in modern plays should be perfect in more ambitious work; but in the troupe were several who,

owing to early training in country theatres, would be quite at ease in the courtly manners of the patch-and-powder period, while others only needed ample rehearsal to feel perfectly at home. We were indebted to Mr. Coghlan for valuable assistance in some rearrangement of the play, without interfering with its text, and also in placing it upon the stage.

We announced our intended revival in these words: 'Sheridan's comedy, the *School for Scandal*, has been for some weeks in preparation, and will shortly be acted for the first time by the Prince of Wales's company. During the hundred years which have nearly elapsed since its original production, the tastes and requirements of audiences have considerably changed; and the management, therefore, feels assured of not being charged with disrespect to the author of this great play for attempting to heighten the effect of his work by an unexampled attention to the costumes, scenery, and general appointments; nor by a few transpositions in the sequence of scenes, made with every regard for the integrity of the text.'

We also conceived the happy idea of introducing, for the first time, a minuet in the second act, which since has grown, through being followed in subsequent revivals, to be regarded as part of the play. The general effect of this introduced dance can best be gathered from a reproduction of it on the curtain painted for us, and which is still used at the Haymarket Theatre. It was also the suggestion for a

charming picture by Val Prinsep, A.R.A., exhibited in the Royal Academy, and for which I remember giving a sitting; the sketch of 'The Minuet' the artist kindly gave to Mrs. Bancroft.

The boldest step, perhaps, throughout our management was taken at this stage of it, in my resolve to raise the charge for admission to the stalls to ten shillings, and the prices to other parts of the theatre accordingly. Some action of the kind was rendered imperative in so small a theatre as the Prince of Wales's, to allow such productions as we were then engaged upon to be properly remunerative; but as the *School for Scandal* had only recently been admirably acted for a long time at another theatre, the moment chosen certainly was dangerous for so courageous an innovation.

When the decision arrived at was conveyed to Bond Street, one of the principal librarians remarked, 'Of course Mr. Bancroft means for the first night only.' When informed that the alteration was intended 'for the future,' the answer was, 'Oh, let Mr. Bancroft have his way; he will withdraw his intention in a week!' Such, however, was not the case. The bold example was soon followed by the Gaiety Theatre, then by the Lyceum, and afterwards by nearly every manager in London. As the question of 'ten shilling stalls' has since been so often discussed, it may be as well to record how the new custom originated.

The revival of *School* ceased on Wednesday,

April 1st. Afterwards the theatre was closed for night rehearsals, and our bold venture was produced on the following Saturday, for which evening we give a copy of the bill of the play :

At eight o'clock, on Saturday, April 4th, 1874 (*the ninth anniversary of Mrs. Bancroft's management, which commenced on Easter Eve,* 1865), *Sheridan's Comedy, the* '*SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL,*' *will be acted, for the first time, by the Prince of Wales's Company.*

SIR PETER TEAZLE	MR. HARE.
SIR OLIVER SURFACE	MR. COLLETTE.
SIR BENJAMIN BACKBITE	MR. LIN RAYNE.
SIR HARRY BUMPER	MR. CRAUFURD.
SIR TOBY	MR. CAMPBELL.
JOSEPH SURFACE	MR. BANCROFT.
CHARLES SURFACE	MR. COGHLAN.
CRABTREE	MR. ARTHUR WOOD.
CARELESS	MR. HERBERT.
ROWLEY	MR. R. CATHCART.
MOSES	MR. F. GLOVER.
SNAKE	MR. NEWTON.
TRIP	MR. MARKBY.
LADY TEAZLE	MISS MARIE WILTON. (Mrs. Bancroft.)
LADY SNEERWELL	MISS FANNY JOSEPHS.
MRS. CANDOUR	MRS. LEIGH MURRAY.
MARIA	MISS B. WILTON.

Guests, Musicians, Servants, etc.

The sequence of scenes will be as follows :—Act I.—Lady Sneerwell's Drawing-room : Morning. Act II.—Lady Sneerwell's Drawing-room : Evening (the *minuet de la cour* will be danced in this scene). Act III., Scene 1.—A Room at Sir Peter Teazle's. Scene 2.—Charles Surface's House : the Lobby. Scene 3.—Charles Surface's House : the Dining Hall. Act IV.—Joseph Surface's Library. Act V.—At Sir Peter Teazle's.

The production of this comedy was so exceptional at the time, that we give an extract from a review which appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, and very graphically describes the elaborate attempt we made to picture days gone by :

'There are four complete and accurate pictures of high life at the close of the last century. We are shown society in Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room; society in Sir Peter Teazle's house; society at Charles Surface's; and, finally, a complete insight into the life of Joseph Surface. Come, then, to Lady Sneerwell's. It is the morning of a great rout or assembly. The amber satin curtains are half pulled up the lofty windows. The sunshine falls upon the quilted panels of spotless gold satin. Lady Sneerwell, in powder and brocade, sits sipping her tea out of faultless china in a high marqueterie chair, her feet upon a cushion of luxurious down. The appearance of the room is dazzling. The tone of society is a lavish and lazy luxury. Here comes Mrs. Candour with her fan and her scandalous stories; Crabtree with his richly-embroidered coat; Sir Benjamin Backbite, in pink silk, and with his mincing, macaroni airs, with his point-lace handkerchief, and his scented snuff; and here amongst all this gaudiness, frivolity, and affectation, sits poor Maria, detesting the shallowness and affectation of the age in which she was born. Change the scene quickly to Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room at night, and contrast it by means of your ready sense of humour with the racing, romping drawing-room of 1874. The amber satin curtains have fallen to the ground. The spinet and the powdered musicians are wheeled away to a corner. The room is bared of furniture and empty for a dance. Listen how the

guests chatter and flatter one another, seated on rout-seats against the wall. They do not discuss the weather, or think anything "awfully jolly," or consider anyone "dreadfully much too nice," or tear round to the strains of a maddening galop, or assume that painfully distressed look inseparable from the modern valse, or perspire, or pant, or exhaust themselves. They take snuff with an air and bow with courtly gravity. They turn a verse or recite an epigram. Sir Benjamin Backbite is pestered for his latest folly, and Mrs. Candour is teased for her latest bit of scandal. But see, Lady Teazle enters, her train held by a negro page-boy, and all eyes are attracted by her diamonds, while all tongues are wagging about the young wife who has married an old bachelor. The music gives out the first bars of a glorious minuet, and tells us of the days when musicians wrote for dancing, and when dancing was an art. With consummate grace and delightful courtesy they commence a minuet. What a delicate affectation of refinement, what a meaning in every gesture and movement!

'We know not which most to admire, the refined orchestration or the studied courtesy of the polished dance. This is the drawing-room society of 1777. Change the scene again to an inner apartment at Sir Peter Teazle's. The semicircular shape of the room is seized as an opportunity for exhibiting some tapestry, which may have come from the manufactory of Sir Francis Crane, at Mortlake in Surrey,

may have been picked up in Flanders, or Bayeux, or Gobelins, dated in the reign of Louis Quatorze. A rare chandelier, suspended by a crimson silken cord, contrasts well with the carved-oak ceiling. A mandolin lies neglected on the floor, and the whole apartment is rich, heavy, and luxurious—the favourite apartment of a wealthy man of taste. Here Sir Peter welcomes his old friend "Noll;" here Lady Teazle, sitting on a low stool at his feet, pets and coaxes her testy and withal affectionate old husband. Once more we make a change. We are amongst bachelors, and dice-players, and winebibbers. We are in the extravagant home of Charles Surface, where his servant Trip borrows money by way of annuity, and the popular Charles himself sits at the head of a rollicking crew surrounded by the pictures of his ancestors. How they drink, and talk, and sing, and swear! How they empty the punch-bowl, carefully and continually replenished by the drawling Trip. Here, at the head of the table, sits Charles Surface in a costume whose colour can only be compared to that of a blue convolvulus ruined by the sun, his vest unbuttoned, his ruffles loosened, and his whole being abandoned to the gaiety of the moment. Moses and Premium are introduced, and mutually pleased and shocked. The family pictures are sold *coram populo*, without any necessity of retiring to another room. Some are smoking, some are snuffing, all are drinking, laughing, and making merry. All round are colour, richness,

animation, and revelry. This, then, is the picture of bachelor life in 1777. Here are the wild oats sown. The scene is hushed and still when we come to the library of Joseph Surface. The picture is in wonderful contrast to the banquet at the home of his brother Charles. The furniture is massive, heavy, and important. The bookcases are of oak, as black as ebony. The windows are of painted glass. The fireplace is as carved and pillared as an old cathedral cope chest. The bindings of the books are of Russia leather, and there are ponderous tomes amongst them. The carpet is of thick pile, and from Turkey. The only contrast of colour in the room is found in the oriental blue vases on the mantel-shelf, in the blue delft dishes on the walls, in the polished brass of the coal-scuttle, in the gleam of the Venetian mirror, and the dull crimson of the all-important screen. These probably are the mere ideas sought to be conveyed to the audience by the beautiful pictures placed before them.'

The parts we ourselves played were so different from those rendered familiar to London playgoers by frequent repetitions of the Robertson comedies, and were treated in such an unconventional way, that we venture to add one brief comment by the same writer upon the performance of them:

'At last we obtain—at least in modern days—a Lady Teazle who is the fresh, genuine, impulsive country maiden wedded to an old bachelor, and not

the practised actress, with all her airs and graces. How often in Lady Teazle the character is forgotten, the actress and the old business invariably remembered! In the scandal scenes we were presented with an archness and sly sense of humour always evident but never superabundant, in which Mrs. Bancroft has a special patent; in the coaxing scene with Sir Peter Teazle, the childlike desire to kiss and make friends, the almost kitten-like content when the reconciliation is made, and the expressive change of the countenance from sunshine to storm when the wrangle commences again, were admirably conveyed. But it was reserved for Mrs. Bancroft to make her most lasting impression in the screen scene. With wonderful care and welcome art the impression conveyed to an innocent mind by the insinuating deceit of Joseph was accurately shown by expression to the audience, though the excellence of the general idea culminated in what is known as Lady Teazle's defence, when the screen has fallen and the *dénouement* has taken place. This was entirely new and thoroughly effective. The tones, alternating between indignation and pathos, between hatred of Joseph and pity for her husband's condition, were expressed with excellent effect. It was the frank and candid avowal of a once foolish but now repentant woman. The womanly instinct which bids Lady Teazle touch and try to kiss her husband's hand, the womanly weakness which makes Lady Teazle totter and trip as she makes for the door of the hated room, the

womanly strength which steels Lady Teazle in her refusal of assistance from Joseph, and the woman's inevitable abandonment to hysterical grief *just before* the heroic goal is reached—were one and all instances of the treasured possession of an artistic temperament.'

'The Joseph Surface of Mr. Bancroft, in that it is one of the most original and reflective performances, will attract most criticism—will probably court the most objection. When Mr. Fechter played Iago, and discarded the hackneyed villain, there was a similar disturbance. According to stage tradition, Iago and Joseph Surface are such outrageous and obvious rascals that they would not be tolerated in any society. Mr. Bancroft reforms this altogether, and, by a subtlety and an ease most commendable, valuably strengthens his position as an actor, and his discrimination as an artist. Joseph Surface can be played as a low, cunning villain, or as a hungry, excited, and abandoned libertine. Mr. Bancroft adopts the golden mean. His deception is never on the surface, his libertinism is never for an instant repulsive. It is one of those instances of good acting which strike the beholder when the curtain is down and the play put away.'

NOTE BY MRS. BANCROFT.

All who witnessed our production of the *School for Scandal* will remember the black boy, a feature, among others, which we introduced into the comedy for the first time. It may

be interesting to know the difficulty we had to find him, for we resolved that our Pompey should be a real one. The docks, workhouses, charitable institutions, and every likely place we could think of, were searched. It was not at all difficult to find a grown-up black, but our page was not to be more than ten years old. Their captains were under contract to take back to their native land those negroes who were on board ships in harbour, and, of course, dared not lend them. We were in despair, for it had been a pet notion of mine, and was to give the finishing-touch to this elaborate picture of the eighteenth century.

Grievously disappointed, I was on the point of giving up all hopes of finding my black boy, when one afternoon a gentleman was announced, who had been shown into the drawing-room accompanied by a true type of African beauty, dressed as a tiger. He was a perfect picture ; very neat, and well pulled together, with spotless breeches, gloves, and collar, a face with large protruding lips, bright eyes, receding forehead, woolly hair, and a skin of a dark copper hue, which shone as if it had been polished, and looked like a well-coloured meerschaum pipe. I thought to myself, 'Pompey is discovered!'

The stranger introduced himself as an owner of sugar plantations in Africa, adding, that the boy, who was called 'Biafra,' after the ship he came over in, belonged to him, and having heard of my great desire to find a black page to appear in a play, if I

would guarantee to return him to his master when I no longer required his services, he would lend this one to me with pleasure; only, I must undertake to keep him in the house, under my own care; the boy in return might make himself useful by helping to wait at table—but it was imperative that he must remain in our house. I was delighted with the proposal, and just at that moment my husband came in. The case was explained to him, and he readily agreed to the conditions. I noticed that from the moment it was settled the boy should *pro tem.* belong to me, he came and stood close by my side, assuming at once that he was my personal property.

When his master had gone, I took Biafra to the other servants, and explained his presence amongst them. They took kindly to him as a novelty, and I very soon heard ripples of laughter, which assured me that he was a success in the kitchen. It was arranged that a second bed should be placed in the manservant's room, who, as it happened, was out for a whole holiday; but being a good-tempered fellow, we felt certain he would not object.

My delight was beyond description, for the production of our play promised to be, at least, an artistic success. I related my adventure in the green-room that evening, and the company there were all highly pleased that after our hitherto vain search and anxiety I had succeeded at last.

On our return home we were informed that Biafra, being sleepy, had gone to bed early; but soon after

midnight we were aroused by shouts and screams from the top of the house. Mr. Bancroft rushed upstairs, while I waited on the landing in a dressing-gown which I had hastily thrown on, wondering what could be the matter, for I heard a terrible scrimmage going on. By-and-by down came Mr. Bancroft, so convulsed with laughter that I could not get a word of explanation from him for some time: he sat on the stairs and positively became hysterical. At last he told me that our manservant, having had permission to visit a relative out of town, had come home rather late, and as he had a latch-key lent to him, the other servants had gone to bed. It appears there was an inference of the man being somewhat unsteady after his relative's hospitality, so that on entering his room and seeing two beds, he no doubt made up his mind that he was either in the wrong house, or that he saw double. It turned out that he stood in the middle of the room, hoping gradually to get the vision of the two beds into proper focus; but finding the effort a failure, he approached one of them, and encountered, for the first time, Biafra. Paralyzed with terror, the poor fellow stood staring aghast at what he thought was the devil. Suddenly the boy opened his large black eyes, and rolled them wildly about, eventually fixing them on the new-comer, who gave a loud yell, which so terrified Biafra that he jumped out of bed. This intensified the situation, and the one screamed against the other until Mr. Bancroft discovered

them. It took a considerable time to calm either of them—the boy was strange in the house, and only half awake; the other, being ignorant of the little nigger's arrival, thought the end of the world had come.

The next morning I took my black boy in triumph to the theatre, where he produced a great effect; he was instructed by me what to do in the business of the scenes he was to appear in. I found him intelligent and most obedient to everything *I* told him to do, but the instruction must all come from *me;* he would take no notice of anyone else, not even of Mr. Bancroft. He always seemed to recognise the fact of having been handed over to me, and that he was in consequence my slave. If others happened to tell him to do the smallest thing, he would stand still and look at me, waiting for *my* orders. This became somewhat of a tax, because it was the same at home, and the servants found him difficult to manage downstairs. He helped to wait at table very fairly, but always stood at my elbow, with his big eyes fixed on mine, not looking at anyone else.

If a funny thing was said by anyone but me, he never smiled; but if I laughed he would at once laugh with me. Whenever he got into disgrace with the other servants, which was very often, I was called upon to scold him; and it was the only thing which had any effect. I could shake him, rebuke him, and threaten him, he would take it all from *me;* but if anyone else attempted to scold him, he would throw

things at them, spit at them, and shout at them. It may be conceded, therefore, that he was, to say the least, an anxiety in the house; but so desirous was I for the completeness of our play, that I determined to endure the inconvenience at home for the sake of it. I consoled myself with the thought that when the piece was produced he would be more at the theatre, and the servants at home would be rid of him for the time. This fact seemed to reconcile them to his stopping in the house. The eventful night arrived, and all the appointments in the comedy were so exquisitely perfect in their beauty and correctness that I could not help feeling very proud. One seemed to be living in the last century, and when the curtain rose on the opening scene, we could hear the welcome murmurs of surprise and admiration everywhere. As the time drew near for my entrance as Lady Teazle, I felt very nervous. I knew that my dress was beautiful, white brocaded satin, profusely trimmed with old lace and pale blush-roses; powdered hair, dressed very high; a chaplet of roses and diamond ornaments, and Biafra to carry my long train. He looked a perfect picture in his laced scarlet coat and knee-breeches, his white turban and gilt dog-collar. He was indeed a magnificent contrast to my white gown, and when we entered, I was told the effect was charming. Biafra behaved most admirably; rarely stared at the mass of people in the theatre, but fixed his attention on me as usual. He followed me everywhere like a

little dog, and obeyed my every look. Mr. Lewis Wingfield was so delighted with the boy's appearance, that he painted an admirable life-size head of him, which he most kindly presented to me.

While on the subject of our production of the *School for Scandal*, and before I end Biafra's adventures, I must tell of a little episode which so amused me at the time, that I venture to think it may be worth alluding to. In the tea scene, the stage was crowded with guests, and the musicians who accompanied the *minuet de la cour*. There was an old woman who was employed in the theatre to assist in the cleaning department—the same old lady we have alluded to with reference to some early rehearsals of *Ours*. She was a poor, humble old thing, and, on account of her age, unable to work much; but we kept her about the place, letting her think herself useful, for her wages helped to support her little home. She had, although in this humble position, a very striking face and aristocratic features, being tall and thin, with perfectly white hair. It occurred to me one day while watching her with a duster in her hand, thinking, poor old soul, that she was very busy, but really doing nothing, that she would, if well dressed, make an effective figure among Lady Sneerwell's guests, and she certainly looked every inch a *grande dame* of the period in her deep red broché sac, trimmed with black Spanish point, her high powdered wig, her feathers and court patches, which really seemed to assist her already finely cut

features; with these and her long Suède gloves, some handsome paste ornaments which I lent her, and large black fan, she presented a conspicuously handsome picture. The dear old lady was delighted with her fine clothes, and walked through the scene exactly as she had been instructed; of course she had nothing to say, that was impossible! But, when I walked amongst the guests to speak to them (*sotto voce*) I came across my old *protégée*, and it struck me at the moment to address her with particular respect, so I made a low curtsey, to which she intelligently responded, and, suiting the word to the action, I said, 'I hope your ladyship is well to-night?' To prove to me that she was equal to the occasion, the dear old thing replied, '*I'm nicely, thank yer, mum!*' This was heard by no one but me, *fortunately!*

But to return to our black boy, who was becoming more and more unpopular at home, for complaints came pouring in every day. The cook could not keep him from the sweets, and he was in constant hot water with the other servants; his appetite was enormous; he would get the potatoes and throw them about the kitchen, hide the housemaid's boots in the hot oven, and the manservant complained that 'he snored so loud he could get no sleep for him, and the more he threw things at his head, the louder he snored.'

One day he was sent into the stables with a message. He no sooner made his appearance there than the horses shied, the dogs barked, and the noise

was so great that the coachman was obliged to turn him out. None of the animals ever took to him; the cats arched their backs, and with swollen tails would spit at him as he passed near them. My parrot, who is a splendid talker and perfectly tame, became silent in his presence, and simply meditated. In fact, the cook remarked, 'The 'ouse ain't the same 'ouse!'

Mr. Bancroft and I at last consulted whether it would not be advisable to take him on the box of the carriage when we drove out, and so relieve the kitchen-folk for the afternoon, which, with his work at the theatre at night, would clear the house of him for the greater half of the day. A happy thought! but I shall never forget the coachman's face when Biafra appeared for the first time by his side. It was a study. We soon had to give up our brilliant idea, for a crowd of boys would collect and jeer if we pulled up, and, while we were driving, would often shout after the boy and give imitations of the sweeps, or cry out, ''Ere's a Christy Minstrel.' One day we stopped to make a purchase, and on leaving the shop were horrified at finding Biafra fighting on the pavement with three or four young street ruffians. He had jumped down to punish them for their insolence, and the scene was awful. We got him home, and I need not say that, greatly to the coachman's glee, he occupied the box no more. I soon found that he was making himself obnoxious at the theatre also, amongst the servants. He would spite them

by playing all sorts of tricks. He would lie down in the darkened passages, and being black he could not be seen, consequently the unwary would tumble over him. I could always influence him while present, but the moment I went away he would misconduct himself again. It all became such an anxiety at last—what with the fear of losing our servants, and complaints pouring in from all quarters day and night—that we resolved to return Biafra to his master; so, after a seven weeks' run, our black friend was restored to his former and, perhaps, more congenial position. Just before his final exit, he thrust all the cook's caps up the chimney! The next time I required a black page was in *Masks and Faces*, but I contented myself with an imitation one. The genuine article had been too much for me.

RESUMED BY S. B. B.

Our production of the *School for Scandal*, aided greatly, of course, by the increase to the prices of admission, proved a success of the first rank, and brought us many interesting letters: a few of them, from the eminence of their writers, we venture to quote. First among them is one which came almost immediately from Wilkie Collins:

'90, Gloucester Place, Portman Square,
April 6, 1874.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'I tried to call at Pleydell House yesterday, but the London distances—I was obliged to go first to South Kensington—were too much for me.

'The get-up of the piece is simply wonderful; I never before saw anything, within the space, so beautiful and so complete: but the splendid costumes and scenery did not live in my memory as Mrs. Bancroft's acting does. I don't know when I have seen anything so fine as her playing of the great scene with Joseph; the truth and beauty of it, the marvellous play of expression in her face, the quiet and beautiful dignity of her repentance, are beyond all praise.

'I cannot tell *you* or tell *her* how it delighted and affected me. You, too, played admirably. The "key" was, perhaps, a little too low; but the conception of the man's character I thought most excellent. I left my seat in a red-hot fever of enthusiasm. I have all sorts of things to say about the acting—which cannot be said here—when we next meet. I heartily congratulate you in the meantime.

'Yours ever,

'WILKIE COLLINS.'

We next find in our collection the opinion of the veteran actor, William Creswick, whose training we fairly thought might rebel at our innovations:

'8, Bloomsbury Square,
June 1, 1874.

'MY DEAR BANCROFT,

'Accept my best thanks for your very kind and courteous note, also for a most interesting and pleasant evening's entertainment.

'Permit me likewise to congratulate Mrs. Bancroft and yourself upon a success so justly and honourably achieved. Your boldness, liberality, and taste in rearranging and mounting the play, instead of "offending my prejudices," most fully and thoroughly gratified them, more especially so, as I have ever thought that the revival of a great dramatic work should resemble the production of a grand book. The illustrations should be original, new, and more brilliant and appropriate than any upon the same subject that may have preceded it. The last edition should be the handsomest and the best, as it unquestionably is in this instance.

'It will be, I believe, a very long time before anyone will be so rash as to attempt another illustrated edition of the *School for Scandal.*

'Be so good as to present my best compliments and thanks to Mrs. Bancroft, and

'Believe me,

'Yours faithfully,

'WM. CRESWICK.

'S. B. Bancroft, Esq.'

A letter much appreciated by us from the distinguished Academician, Mr. Frith, will be welcomed by the reader, if only on the score of his recent great success in another walk of life; for many to whom we hope our book may appeal must have been among those whom his charmingly-told reminiscences have recently delighted:

'7, Pembridge Villas, Bayswater, W.,
July 31, 1874.

'MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT,

'You and all your people gave me and mine very great pleasure last night. I am afraid to say how many times I have seen the *School for Scandal*, and how many great actors and actresses I have seen in it. I won't say but that on some occasions one or two of the parts have been better filled; but take your cast altogether, it is one that no other theatre could show, and the great play was rendered with high intelligence.

'Mrs. Bancroft was, as she always is, perfect. To me the minuet was one of the most delightful bits of grace and exquisite taste ever seen. It took me back to the days of my great-grandmother, a hundred years ago.

'May your shadows never grow less!

'Always faithfully yours,

'W. P. FRITH.

'S. B. Bancroft, Esq.'

We will only add a characteristic and appreciative letter from another stage veteran, Walter Lacy, who defies Time and still, as cheerily as ever, wakes the echoes of the Garrick Club, by his remarkable choice of words:

'38, Montpelier Square, Knightsbridge,
Thursday Night.

'DEAR BANCROFT,

'Some forty years since, Macready was announced to play "Richard the Third for the first

time in London these eight years," and, although I had banqueted right royally on the grand Edmund Kean, I was not to be weaned from my old love. I thoroughly enjoyed the highly intellectual treat prepared for me by Mac's new reading; and so was it to-night in the classic little temple where I made my *début* in the *French Spy* with Celeste, shortly after seeing the new Richard at Drury Lane. As Macready carefully avoided every point made by Kean, much of the comedy to-night was made pathetic, and *vice versâ*, but, both in conception and finish of execution, evincing the common-sense, good taste, delicacy and refinement of yourself and our most natural actress, whose Lady Teazle had touches of unapproachable excellence. The brothers were equally admirable, and would perhaps have been even more so had they changed parts. Mr. Hare's screen-scene was worthy of his reputation, and nothing could surpass the Lady Sneerwell. The "picture"-scene is distinctly an advance upon the old arrangement, but I doubt if the guests, except Careless, should return; they confused the scene, I thought, and turned it into a public auction instead of a private sale.

'In haste, with kindest regards and thanks for a great treat.

'Faithfully yours,

'WALTER LACY.

S. B. Bancroft, Esq.'

I am sure, on the score of our long acquaintance, my old friend will forgive me for endeavouring to

amuse the reader as his language amused me, by repeating his extraordinary account of the effort of an aspiring tragedian in the great scene between Shylock and Tubal. In the situation where the Jew learns how his daughter parted with the ring which he would not have sold for 'a wilderness of monkeys,' Walter Lacy described the actor in these words:

'At this point, sir, he leapt three feet into the air, and then gave a cry like the skreel of a banished eagle!' Speaking of some of his own performances, he thus related his different methods of dining: 'When I played "Bluff Hal," sir (Henry of England), I drank brown porter and dined off British beef; but if I had to act the Honourable Tom Shuffleton, I contented myself with a delicate cutlet and a glass of port which resembled a crushed garnet, and then sallied on to the stage with the manners of a gentleman and the devil-me-care air of a man about town!'

Apropos of Walter Lacy's letter, I must venture to dispute his judgment in suggesting that I might with advantage have exchanged parts with Coghlan, whose splendid acting as Charles Surface was so greatly praised by all the critics, and by all judges of our art; while sharing to the fullest extent this admiration for his performance, I would yet venture to wonder if, in its beautiful finish, the character was not in his hands somewhat more suggestive of a dissolute young French *Marquis*, than of a reckless and boisterous young Englishman.

At this time Mr. Bellew, who had long been seriously ill, seeming, in fact, to slowly fade away after his return from a long tour in America, where he went to give his readings, was living quite close to our house in the Grove End Road, and very often one or both of us would sit with him and try to help some sad half-hours away. He was especially interested in our performance of the *School for Scandal*, hoping for an early visit to it, which was never destined to take place. We can only conclude that one of our visits must have been overdue, for not many days before his death he wrote this note of gentle reproach:

'*Friday, May* 29, 1874.

'My dear Bancroft,

'England is my nation, London is my dwelling place, 16, Circus Road is my location, and Bellew my nomination.

'As you won't come and see me, I write to inquire how you are.

'Yours very truly,

'J. M. Bellew.'

In June he passed quietly away, and we saw him laid to rest in the Catholic Cemetery at Kensal Green. When he was still a clergyman of the Protestant Church (before he became a public reader and reciter), I very frequently heard him preach; for he was a man of great oratorical and highly cultivated gifts; doubtless owing something of his pulpit popularity to his grand voice, his

beautiful hair, and *soigné* appearance; his reading of the 'death chapter' from the Burial Service being especially impressive and powerful. On one occasion—the last day of the year 1865, I remember—I went to his chapel in Bloomsbury, which was always crowded, to hear his midnight sermon, in which he made reference to some of the great men whom the world had lost during the expiring year, including, I recollect quite well, Lord Palmerston, President Lincoln, and Cardinal Wiseman. When Bellew mentioned the last name, it was received by some foolish bigot among the congregation with a distinct and pronounced hiss—a strange sound to hear in a sacred building. Bellew paused, evidently amazed at the interruption, and then proceeded, amidst perfect stillness, with his panegyric to the memory of a deservedly remarkable man.

I will repeat a little story which Bellew told us of a neighbour of his, who for years wore one of the most palpable of wigs, being at the same time quite convinced in his own mind that no one shared the mysterious secret; for he even went so far with the evident deception as to have several wigs which he wore in turn, the hair of each of them being of different lengths. Bellew one morning met his friend just as he was leaving his house, and asked if they could walk together. 'Delighted,' said the owner of the coffee-coloured 'jasey,' 'if you are going towards Bond Street, where I must stop to *have my hair cut.*'

Poor Bellew! he was much regretted by all who really knew him, and by those whom he took the least pains to teach the way to like him. We are glad to believe that we were of them.

To return to stage matters, I hope the reader has not followed us so far in our book without believing that successful management has to work very far ahead—one of its greatest strains. 'Sufficient for the day,' etc., is a proverb of no use to its followers; 'The early bird' being much more suitable as a theatrical motto. Guided by this principle, we were still only in the early days which followed the performance of the *School for Scandal*, when we decided that a revival of *Society*, conjointly with the production of Mr. Gilbert's 'dramatic contrast,' should form our next programme, which we anticipated would be required in the autumn. We wished, however, at once to settle what should follow even that, for persistent attacks of hay-fever had so distressed and pained Mrs. Bancroft for the last few summers, that it became desirable to arrange a programme without her, for the time of year which proved so trying to her health. This was no easy task, and led me naturally to try and think of some attractive substitute. As I have before asserted that I was mainly responsible for the choice of plays during our management, let me at once admit that a variety of circumstances led my wandering thoughts—amazing as the revelation seemed to be when subsequently made public—towards Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

This fact I allude to now, for it will be more fully dwelt on later, to show how far our work was always in advance, and that no success, however great, of the moment blinded us to this necessity. Our failures received the same amount of careful forethought as did our triumphs.

Faithful to our rule not to forego our holiday, we refused some splendid offers to take our version of the *School for Scandal*, with all its paraphernalia, to the leading provincial cities; while the three thousand miles of sea remained, unhappily, an insurmountable obstacle to the consideration of brilliant proposals from America with the same object, so that we broke the run of the old comedy on August 7th, after having played it to more than a hundred full houses, and went away to Switzerland *viâ* Ostend. We stayed some little time at the Kaltbad Hotel, above the Lake of Lucerne. Among our companions there this year were Arthur Cecil, and Palgrave Simpson, who dearly loved the place, and spent many summers there. Our ultimate object was to get on to Venice, where we had arranged to meet our scenic artist at the beginning of September, to see what nooks and spots we best could choose for our proposed bold attempt to place the *Merchant of Venice* upon our little stage. I remember there were enough friends of J. L. Toole in this mountain hotel (but where would there not be?) to send him a round-robin telegram to wish him 'good luck' on the day of his first appearance in America. We drove

in two days over the St. Gothard Pass to Bellinzona, and thence, still by carriage, for there was no railway then, to Lugano, where the inn we stayed at had evidently once been a convent; next, partly by steamer, then by road, to Menaggio, on the Lake of Como, rowing on to Cadenabbia, where we stayed some days. The first impression of the Italian lakes, in perfect weather, is one not easily effaced; and even on the most prosaic mind of this most prosaic nineteenth century must have its effect. With many a sigh we left this earthly paradise, for a short rest of a day and a half at Milan: hurried glimpses at its marble cathedral, the old church of S. Ambrogio, the Scala, and the many beauties of the city, were all that we could spare time to snatch as we hastened to our destination.

We arrived at Venice on a lovely evening, in the great heat of early September days, and our journey to Danieli's was the first experience of that strange city, perhaps of all places the least disappointing to the imagination. Our brief and busy visit would not allow us to attempt a description in any proper terms of the peerless beauty of this wondrous city. The powerful pen of Ruskin may have shattered the romance formerly attached to the 'Bridge of Sighs,' and reduced the stories of its dungeons and their inmates to a sort of sentimental fraud, on a par, perhaps, with the tale of William Tell and the apple, or of King Alfred and the cakes. What if the existing Rialto could have nothing in common with old Shy-

lock and the merchant princes of those days! What if the house shown to tourists as being once the abode of Othello, in which (poor fool!) he smothered dear Desdemona, is but another of the many self-same poetic swindles! There remains more than enough reality to dwell upon and think about. A kind of spell seems to be wound about any but the most unromantic traveller who has the luck to arrive when the moon is full, and, having escaped from the *facchini* at the quay, is taken, instead of by a wretched 'growler' or hotel omnibus, in a gondola to his hotel, listening in silence, while he glides along, to the splash of the oar and the musical warning-cry from the boatman as he approaches corners on the way.

There, as arranged, we met George Gordon, our scene-painter, whom we found brimful of the delights his few days' stay had given him. Every hour seemed occupied in settling to what purpose we best could put it, and very carefully we chose the spots we felt would make good pictures for our narrow frame. In the Doges' Palace we saw plainly that the Sala della Bussola was the only one within our means to realize, and this room we decided should be accurately reproduced for the trial of Antonio and Portia's pleading on his behalf. We resolved to show different views of Venice in the form of curtains between the acts of the play, and, when all was settled (after delightful days and evenings spent in seeing what we could in the time at our disposal), we

went away, leaving George Gordon to complete his sketches, only too happy to linger in its congenial atmosphere.

To tell the truth, we suffered greatly from mosquitoes, and found the pastile remedy almost as trying, through going to Venice so early in September; but those troubles soon passed, leaving us permanent and delightful memories of the Piazzo San Marco, where, of course, we fed the friendly pigeons; of the grand cathedral church, with its wondrous mosaics and its bronze horses; the Campanile, with its view that tells you of the possibility of getting from quarter to quarter of the city without once entering a gondola; the Palace of the Doges, so grandly entered by its Giant Stairs, with its superb Titians and Paul Veroneses; the distant Lido (where a horse looked almost strange), and its lovely bathing in the Adriatic. We can only say, *A bientôt.*

CONCLUDING NOTES BY MRS. BANCROFT.

My first visit to Venice was made memorable by those tiresome and spiteful mosquitoes. During dinner, we, and others at table, were discussing the horrors of their bites, and several people seemed to possess a remedy if used immediately after the sting of these relentless creatures, when suddenly a gentleman, a doctor, who had but just arrived, interrupted the conversation by remarking that none of us knew anything about it. 'The only way,' he added, 'was to prevent their biting *at all.*' He was a loud-voiced, noisy man,

rather bumptious and self-opinionated. He did not *advise*, but said '*you must*,' in a way calculated to frighten a nervous patient into a premature grave. 'What's the use of rubbing stuff into your skin *after* the mischief is done?—your ammonias, and strong spirit of this, that, or the other! Do you all want erysipelas? I prefer the mosquitoes. But they never touch *me*. And why? Because I prevent the beggars from coming near me: you won't see the vestige of a sting on *me*. When I leave Venice you will find with envy how I have escaped; and if you ask me, I will present you all with my prescription. You won't catch *me* walking about my bedroom with a lighted pastile, as if I was carrying on an incantation, and choking myself with the fumes—oh no!'

None of us wanted to catch him doing anything of the sort. He was extremely ugly when dressed: what must he have been in his *robe de nuit?* We were full of hope that his preventive would be a valuable addition to our pharmacopœian treasures, so treated his remarks with respect, and allowed him to shout his opinions, which he did loud enough to be heard on the other side of the canal.

'Look out for me to-morrow morning, all of you. Not a spot—not a sign of one. My own invention—my own idea!—splendid discovery! Good-night. I shall leave my window open all night—I like air—I can defy the mosquitoes. Good-night.'

Our friend Mr. Gordon, it so chanced, slept in

the next room to the doctor—or, at least, *ought* to have slept; but his neighbour spent the night in throwing things about, and exclaiming in warm language on the subject of mosquitoes. The window was soon shut with a bang, chairs were pitched from one end of the room to another, towels were dashed against the wall, groans and oaths were alternately uttered, until at last audible and earnest prayers were overheard for the torture to stop. The next morning, when we inquired for the doctor who was to be our benefactor, we were informed that he had gone off by the first train. He had been so fearfully bitten in the night that his most familiar friends would not have recognised him; and George Gordon, who had seen him, remarked, 'He was ugly yesterday, but this morning he resembled something at the Zoo!'

Apropos of our own departure a few days later, travellers know how we all try to obtain the best seats in a railway carriage, and what a rush there is sometimes to get them. I have a very unpleasant recollection of a scene at the Turin station. We had secured two window-seats, and after placing some parcels and bags upon them, we walked up and down the platform, until we heard the well-known '*Partenza!*' As we approached our carriage, a gentleman, with two boys, preceded us, and, seeing our things on the seats, immediately removed them, and sat down; upon which Mr. Bancroft informed him that the seats were taken, and were ours. The

new-comer would not listen to what was said, but insisted that we had no right to secure them; then my husband and he had a hot dispute for some time in French, but discovering soon that they both were English, continued the argument in their native language.

I became more and more alarmed, but said nothing until I saw things were getting serious, when I besought them to quarrel no more, adding, that rather than there should be any unpleasantness we would move to another carriage at the next stopping-place. One of the sons at once leaned forward to whisper to his father, and the quarrel suddenly ceased. Not another word was spoken until we reached a station where we all had to get out for dinner. During the meal, the gentleman who was so irate about our securing the seats came up to us, and said: 'Mr. Bancroft, will you allow me to offer Mrs. Bancroft and yourself my apologies? I am exceedingly sorry for my loss of temper. You were in the right, I in the wrong. Let me entreat you not to change your carriage, but allow me to do all in my power to make the rest of Mrs. Bancroft's journey as pleasant as I can.'

It transpired that he had not known us in the train, for I was wearing a thick gauze veil to hide the attentions of the mosquitoes, and my husband was sunburnt beyond recognition; but the moment I spoke the son knew my voice, and told his father who we were—a discovery, I am happy to say, which

threw oil upon the troubled waters, for no one could have been kinder or more considerate than our travelling companions during the remainder of our long journey to Paris, where we passed a short but pleasant time with friends, which brought our holiday to an end.

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